

Thursday,
September 10, 2009
Chicago Tribune
SPECIAL REPORT

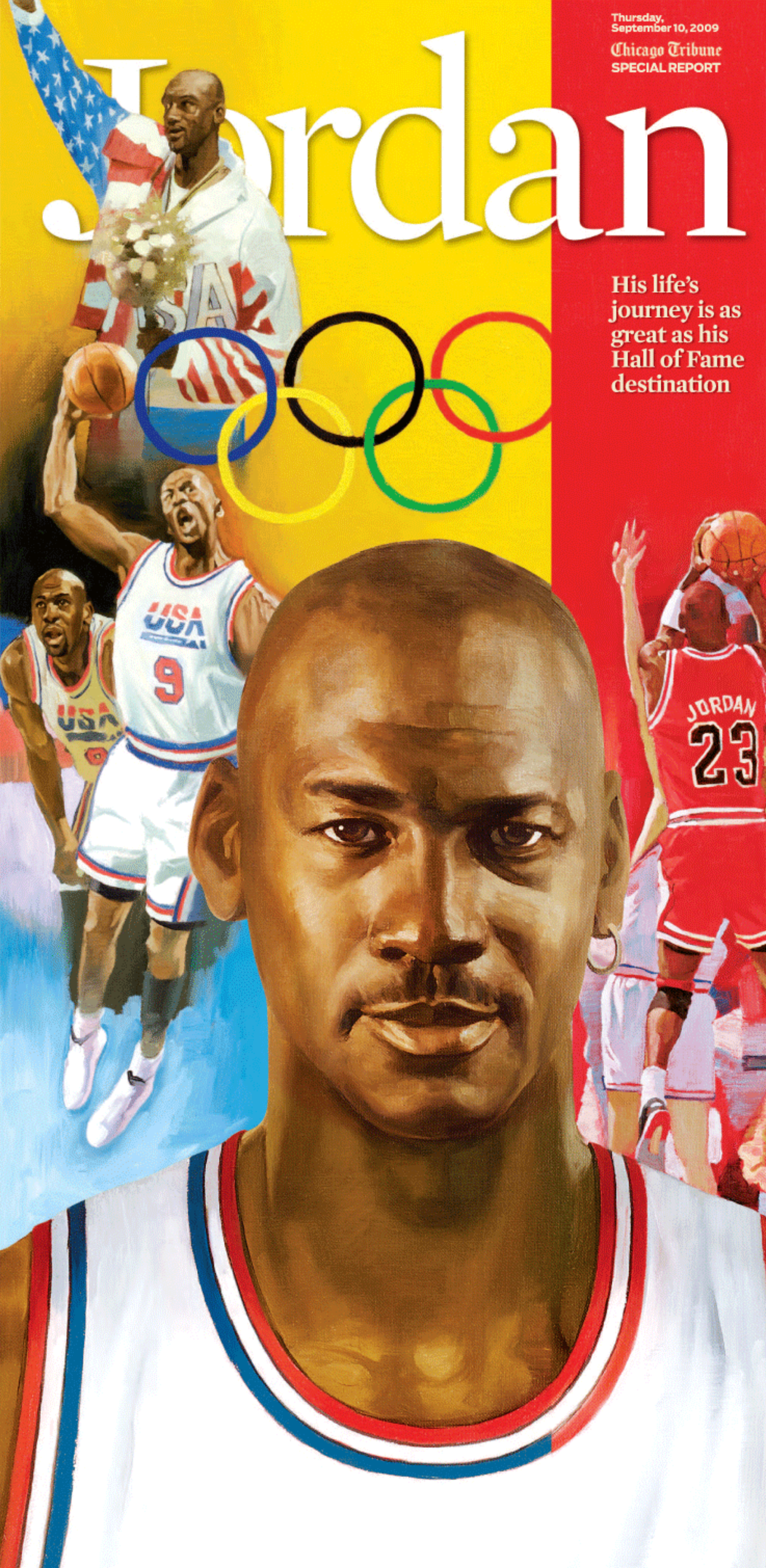


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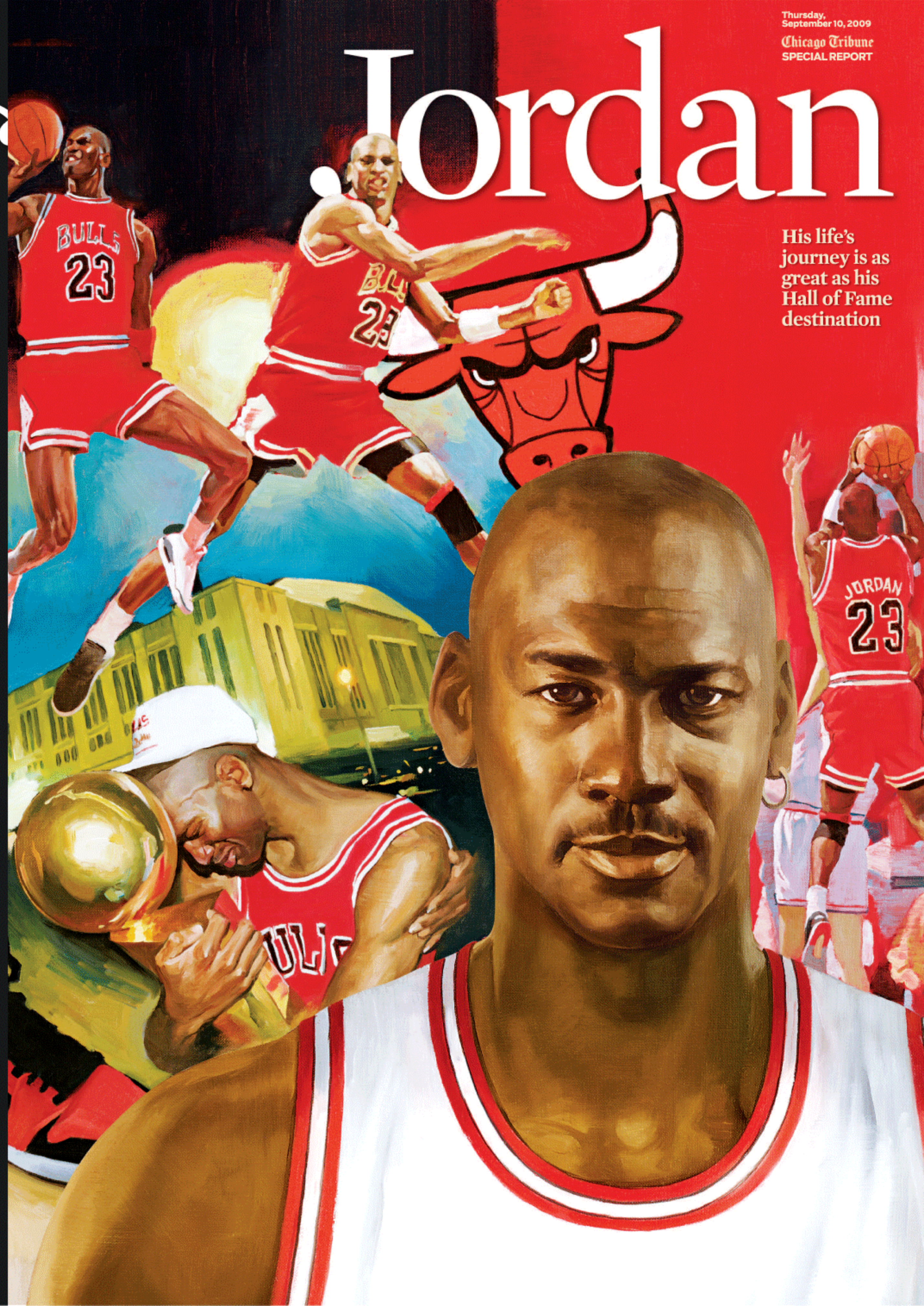


Michael Jeffrey

Jordan

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His life's
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About this report

Raising our game to tell his story

How do you measure a ripple? In the case of Michael Jordan, how do you measure thousands of them spread across the country and around the world?

A team of Tribune reporters set out this summer to detail his life with greater clarity than ever; the many chapters of Jordan's life — and the stories of those whose lives he changed forever.

From Brooklyn to Birmingham. From Barcelona to Beaverton. Los Angeles twice and right here in Chicago for those six championships. And Washington, where his playing career came to an end — and his time as an executive got off to a disappointing start.

You know some of these people.

Scottie Pippen, the ultimate sidekick and one of the NBA's greatest players in his own right. Dean Smith, his college coach who remains among the most influential forces in Jordan's life. Nike's Phil Knight, whose company introduced the world to Air Jordan, creating a brand unmatched in sports.

Others you've never met — and neither has Michael Jordan.

There's Jordan Keith Dalton, the player from Warren Township High School whose basketball ability has put him in position to earn his college degree next spring. Dalton's father gave his son the name — and the expectations that came with it.

And Brooklyn's John Anderson, wearing Jordan's No. 6 North Carolina jersey when he learns that MJ was born across the street from where he's standing.

"Jordan is one of those players, he made people dream that anybody could do whatever," Anderson told Rick Morrissey. "Go from nothing to something. Knowing he was born here makes me feel like I can do anything."

Before his second birthday, Jordan and his family moved to Wilmington, N.C., where he was called Mike and "Rabbit" long before he made a movie with a bunny.

He won a national title at North Carolina, was Rookie of the Year with the Bulls before his six NBA titles. He won two Olympic gold medals. And he retired three times.

This section retraces those steps at every stop along the way — including the devastating murder of his father, James, and the gambling issues that threatened his public appeal.

On Friday, Jordan will enter the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame with John Stockton, David Robinson, Jerry Sloan and Rutgers women's coach C. Vivian Stringer. It's a fitting conclusion to a one-of-a-kind career.

Mike Kellams

ASSOCIATE MANAGING EDITOR/SPORTS



chicagotribune.com/jordan

The Tribune's special report continues online with photo galleries, interactive stats and video interviews with those

who know him best and witnessed Jordan's development, from

Wilmington to Washington. Videos include the following:

■ An assessment of his career through the eyes of journalists,

teammates and Jordan himself.

■ Dan McGrath talking with coaches and teammates from

Jordan's Babe Ruth baseball and E.A. Laney High School

basketball teams about how a town in North Carolina shaped

Mike into Michael.

■ Bulls great Scottie Pippen talking with K.C. Johnson about

his favorite MJ moments and offering his thoughts on Jordan's

lasting legacy.

■ Bulls Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf talking with Johnson about

his personal memories of Jordan, the United Center and those

six Bulls championships.

■ Tribune journalists looking back at Jordan's short-lived

career as a minor-league baseball player with the Birmingham

Barons.

■ Johnson visiting Ceola Clark, a player at Western Illinois

and a former AAU teammate of Jordan's oldest son, Jeff. Clark

proudly talks about the dozens of Air Jordans in his closet.

As Johnson notes, Clark has almost a "sickness" for the shoes

— and he is not alone in suffering this affliction. Includes a fun

model-by-model history of the shoes.

■ Assessing Jordan's pioneering evolution to becoming the

foremost pitchman for dozens of companies, most notably

Nike.

Share your memories of Jordan and the Bulls dynasty at

chicagotribune.com/jordan

On the covers

Illustrations by Roberto Parada



Looming over the basketball courts for PS 67 in Brooklyn is the former Cumberland Hospital (now a homeless shelter), where Jordan was born in 1963. BRIAN CASSELLA/TRIBUNE PHOTOS

Brooklyn

History proves elusive in the place where the greatest basketball player ever was born

This is a landmark that whispers.

The man who reshaped the sports world’s topography to look suspiciously like the patterned bottom of a basketball shoe was born here, in the former Cumberland Hospital, on Feb. 17, 1963. The 10-story brick building is now a homeless shelter, one that critics say is among the worst in New York. There is no hint, no suggestion — not even a small bronze rendering of a wagging tongue — that Michael Jordan entered the world in this place. There are, however, three guards manning a metal detector in the foyer.

But Jordan is here, if not in spirit, then certainly in apparel. On a warm July day, John Anderson is walking down the block where the shelter, the Auburn Family Residence, stands watch. He is wearing a powder-blue North Carolina jersey, No. 23.

By Rick Morrissey

Jordan’s college jersey. The 42-year-old chef lives across the street from the former hospital.

“Here? Michael Jordan was born here?” he said. “Oh, man. I had no idea.”

He’s not alone. Few people in the Ft. Greene neighborhood seem to know Jordan was born in the former hospital. His parents lived in Brooklyn for only 18 months while James Jordan, Michael’s father, went through mechanic’s training on the GI Bill.

But still, arguably the best basketball player ever, and it’s a relative secret he was born in this spot?

“They should probably make this place much better because of that,” said Shameko Martin, who lives in the shelter with her husband and two children. “Millions of people wear his sneakers and wear his clothes.”

“The same way they remember Michael Jackson, his music and how he impacted the world, they should do the same with Jordan. I didn’t know he was from here. There should be something. Something with his name on it.”

Perhaps it’s better like this. Jordan will be inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame on Friday along with John Stockton, David Robinson, Jerry Sloan and Rutgers women’s coach C. Vivian Stringer. There is very little mystery left to his life story. Most of us know it by heart: from his being cut from his high school varsity team as a sophomore to his standout career and national title with the Tar Heels to his two Olympic gold medals to his short minor-league baseball career to his six NBA titles with the Bulls. From highlight film to “Space Jam.”

From product endorser to Charlotte team executive. From his game-winning basket as a freshman in the 1982 NCAA title game against Georgetown to his game-winner against Utah for the NBA title in 1998, when, with one move and, OK, perhaps an offensive foul, he made the Jazz’s Bryon Russell go stand in the corner.

Golfer, gambler, car-pooler.

So there’s nothing wrong with a whisper of a start. Nothing wrong with some nuance and subtlety and intrigue involving a man who, six years after his basketball career ended, remains near the top of national



In a mural on a building across the East River in Manhattan, Michael Jordan’s memory endures.

popularity lists for athletes. Nothing wrong with a little peace and quiet before he made all that noise.

Lest there be any misunderstanding or any tendency toward mythmaking, let the record show that Michael Jeffrey Jordan arrived in this world shoeless, which is to say Nike-less. And he did not have a bloody nose on arrival. Too bad, because we could have offered the perfect diagnosis: early onset altitude sickness.

No, he arrived fairly healthy.

“After Michael’s birth the doctors did keep him a couple of days to be sure that his lungs were clear of some mucus,” said his mother, Deloris.

He would go on to have an impact everywhere he went — even here, in a neighborhood that has known hardship for decades. Anderson, the man in Jordan’s North Carolina jersey, said of the seven friends he was closest with growing up, three are in prison, four are dead.

But knowing that Jordan was born across the street from where he’s standing brings a smile.

“Jordan is one of those players, he made

people dream that anybody could do whatever,” he said. “Go from nothing to something. Knowing he was born here makes me feel like I can do anything.”

James and Deloris Jordan came to Brooklyn in 1962 with a son, Larry, leaving their two older children with James’ mother in Wallace, N.C.

James, a sharecropper’s son, was studying airplane hydraulics. Michael was the fourth of five children born to the Jordans. He has two older brothers and an older and younger sister.

There was some question whether he would be born at all. Deloris’ mother had died unexpectedly in the fall of 1962, and it had such an effect on the pregnant woman that her doctor ordered bed rest for a week, fearing a miscarriage.

A few years later, Michael would receive a nasty electrical shock when he touched a live wire.

“I’ve got to believe one thing,” James Jordan told the Tribune in 1990. “One day, God was sitting around and decided to make the perfect basketball player. He gave him a little hardship early to make him appreciate what he would earn in the end and called him Michael Jordan.”

Deloris Jordan does not remember exactly where the family lived during its short stay in New York nearly five decades ago, only that it was in Brooklyn but not the Ft. Greene neighborhood.

Her doctor was in Manhattan, but she went into labor earlier than anticipated, and it was off to Cumberland immediately.

No one could possibly know what the boy would become. Deloris Jordan said she and her late husband certainly didn’t. This wasn’t Earl Woods shaping his son out of the womb into an iconic golfer.

This was a baby who entered the world, made his own way and ended up palming it like a basketball. His appeal would know no barriers. Poor kids would love him. CEOs would love him. They would love his ridiculous skills. Physics would tell them that there is no such thing as hang time, but they would ignore it in the face of firsthand evidence to the contrary. They would love his will to win.

They would love to buy anything from him, from underwear to shoes to sports drinks.

“Michael is one of the most important athletes, obviously. But even beyond that, he’s one of the most important cultural figures in the history of the U.S.,” said Todd Boyd, a University of Southern California professor who has studied sports and culture. “I don’t think that’s in question.”

“When you talk about an athlete who clearly dominated his sport but also transcended the sport in terms of his success as a brand, his ability to market products, just what Michael Jordan came to stand for after a while was perhaps the biggest transition anybody’s been able to make from the basketball court to the highest realm of American popular culture.”

He would go on to change the game — what 6-foot-6 player dominates the NBA like that? He would impact people everywhere

Please turn to **Next Page**

The timeline

By Shannon Ryan and Brian Hamilton



Feb. 17, 1963: Michael Jeffrey Jordan is born in Brooklyn, N.Y., the third son of James and Deloris Jordan. The family moves to Wilmington, N.C., before his second birthday.



1977: Jordan wins outstanding athlete award at Trask Middle School.

Fall 1978: As a 5-foot-9-inch sophomore at Emsley A. Laney High School, Jordan is deemed too short and cut from the varsity team. Coach Clifton “Pop” Herring selects 6-8 sophomore Leroy Smith instead.

Summer 1979: A motivated Jordan, who has grown five inches, makes the varsity as a junior. As a senior, he averages 29.2 points, 11.6 rebounds and 10.1 assists per game.

April 11, 1981: Jordan stars in the McDonald’s All-American game with Patrick Ewing and Chris Mullin, setting a record with 30 points.



UNC

March 29, 1982: As a freshman at North Carolina, Jordan nails the game-winning shot against Georgetown for a 63-62 victory and the national title.

March 27, 1983: Despite 26 points from Jordan, the No. 2 Tar Heels are upset in the Elite Eight by Georgia. Jordan is named the Sporting News college player of the year.

March 3, 1984: In a double-overtime game against Duke, Jordan scores 25 points. The victory marks the first time in 10 seasons an ACC team has gone undefeated in conference.

March 22, 1984: Jordan scores just 13 points and the Tar Heels are upset by Indiana in the Sweet 16.

Brooklyn

“Michael is one of the most important athletes, obviously. But even beyond that, he’s one of the most important cultural figures in the history of the U.S.”

Continued from **Previous Page**

and make hundreds of millions of dollars doing it.

“In spite of the nonsense we heard when Michael Jackson died and people were trying to make connections between Michael Jackson and Barack Obama, I honestly think it was Michael Jordan in the ’80s who broke down those barriers and became his own brand in the way that Obama is the first president with his own brand,” Boyd said.

The brand of the child who was born in this teeming borough is very simple. During his career, if you mentioned the name “Michael” — one of the most popular and commonplace — chances were good that people would know whom you meant.

And if the name escaped you, the silhouette of a man — basketball in hand, arm stretched over the head, legs splayed en route to a dunk — didn’t.

The former Cumberland Hospital, located at 39 Auburn Pl., closed in 1983 and later was converted into a homeless shelter.

There are 119 families, including 111 children, living there.

Advocates for the shelter’s residents had fought with the city about a lack of heat in the building, and in July, workers were busy installing new windows. There is more work to do.

Two housing developments surround the former hospital. A neighborhood association official said tenants’ average income is \$11,000 a year.

Remember how relieved Chicago tourism officials were in the ’80s and ’90s when the city apparently had become more associated worldwide with Jordan than with gangster Al Capone? Capone grew up near the Brooklyn Navy Yard, a few Tommy gun sprays from the park and the former hospital where Jordan was born. There’s no escaping Capone, Chicago.

The Ft. Greene Park basketball court is a few blocks from the homeless shelter. On the court this day, nobody seems to care about history.

Between pickup games, there’s a discussion going on.

Most believe LeBron James is better than Kobe Bryant. They know about Michael Jordan, but they live almost completely in the present. A visitor attempts to lead them out of darkness, but they are a product of their time.

“LeBron is the best,” insisted Kelith Appolon, 14. “He has the best shooting percentage, more rebounds, more assists.”

There wouldn’t have been a LeBron if there hadn’t been an M.J. Oh, James would have been the standout baller he has become, but Jordan paved the way, in gold, for all the marketing opportunities LeBron has. And Bryant? He patterned his game, his speech inflections and his mannerisms after Jordan.

Look at these kids standing in a park in the middle of Brooklyn. Twenty-five years after the first Air Jordan basketball shoes arrived in stores, three of the teenagers are wearing Jordan shoes. Another is wearing a Jordan shirt. That is part of his athletic and cultural significance. It’s impossible to separate the basketball career from his career as a marketer for Nike, Gatorade, Hanes and others. But he stands for something, something James and Bryant aspire to but haven’t yet attained. He stands for something all those corporations latched on to: classiness, excellence, accessibility, grace of movement, power. There’s a bearing to him, and no matter what has gone wrong in his life, he has risen above, the way you might expect a former NBA dunk champion to do.

But — kids these days — the players at Ft. Greene Park don’t see the big picture. How, they’re asked, would Jordan have been different if his family had stayed in Brooklyn rather than gone back to North Carolina?

“He would have been tougher,” said 15-year-old Miguel Diaz.

Jordan, one of the most strong-willed players to ever lace on shoes, tougher? Hard to believe.

“You have to fight for everything here,” Appolon said. “You can’t back down.”

How about playing with the flu in Game 5 of the 1997 NBA Finals and scoring 38 points in a victory over Utah? Tough enough for you?

The players believe Jordan’s game would have been different had he stayed here — more outlandish, more bombastic.

“Allen Iverson plays New York basketball,” said Ernest Bastien, 28, from nearby Bedford-Stuyvesant. “He’s not waiting for picks to be set. He takes the ball, crosses you over, tells you about it and just destroys you. That’s New York basketball. It makes you tougher.”

It is pointed out that Iverson hasn’t won a thing and Jordan has six rings. The group concedes that this is true but that Iverson hasn’t exactly had a Scottie Pippen on his team.

LeBron, Kobe and A.I. are Now, and even though the players might wear Jordan’s apparel, they view him as something like the godfather of basketball, a benevolent presence looking down upon something he helped create. But he’s not a player anymore, and thus he’s somewhat out of mind.

Nevertheless, this being New York, you probably won’t be surprised that the players are adopting Jordan as one of theirs.

“He was born here,” said Bastien. “You can’t take the Brooklyn out of somebody.”



Fred Lynch was Jordan’s basketball coach at Emsley A. Laney High School. “He always had talent,” Lynch said. **BRIAN CASSELLA/TRIBUNE PHOTOS**

Wilmington

Hints of what lay ahead: Mike becoming Michael



Left above: Dick Neher, Jordan’s Babe Ruth League coach, points to the record he keeps of his league draft picks. Jordan was Neher’s No. 1 pick in 1976.



Right above: Neher shows the newspaper clippings he saved of his former outfielder/first baseman, Mike “Rabbit” Jordan.
Right below: 15-year-old Mike Jordan in a 1978 Wilmington youth baseball photo. “Great teammate,” his coach remembers. **PHOTO PROVIDED**



A page right out of the Wilmington Star-News. “What Mike had,” Lynch recalls, “the talent, the work ethic, the will to win ... you either have it or you don’t.” BRIAN CASSELLA/TRIBUNE PHOTO

Wilmington

In high school, something remarkable happens after his sophomore year

Records indicate Michael Jordan was born into this world in the winter of 1963, but witnesses believe his birth as an otherworldly basketball talent occurred over the summer of 1979, between his sophomore and junior years at E.A. Laney High School.

“Mike was about 5-10 at the end of 10th grade, no more than 5-11,” recalled Fred Lynch, Laney’s current varsity coach and the sophomore coach during MJ’s Buccaneer days.

“He always had talent — he was our best 9th grader and our best 10th grader. He played with a lot of heart, he had guard skills and he always had big, strong hands. By his junior year he shot up to 6-3, almost 6-4. All of a sudden you had size to go with that talent and drive. ... He just blossomed.”

Todd Parker, a Laney teammate who played various sports with Jordan “since T-ball,” saw it coming, even if he wasn’t quite sure what it was.

“Final game of our sophomore year, we were playing down at Goldsboro. Mike stole the ball and had a breakaway, and he went in and dunked it — I mean he threw one down,” Parker said, his tone conveying his awe at the move 30 years later: “I believe that was the first competitive dunk of his life. We were like, ‘Wow, where did that come from?’

“Then he comes back for junior year, he’s a different guy, no longer skinny little Mike. He’s jumping out of the gym. I’m like, ‘What?’ ”

It was the makings of the Michael the world knows now.

“I guess we knew then that he was going to be special,” Parker said. “But nobody could have envisioned him becoming the greatest player of all time.”

You know the story: Jordan had been cut from the Laney varsity as a sophomore.

Fred Lynch is a trim, serious man under his shaven head, and that bit of history prompts a scowl. Urban legend, he insists.

Clifton “Pop” Herring, his predecessor who has long since stepped away from coaching, had a “no sophomores” policy for the Laney varsity.

Because Leroy Smith was 6-7 and the Buccaneers were height-challenged, he was an exception. MJ was not.

“Mike wasn’t quite ready for the varsity as a 10th grader,” Lynch said, “and we all agreed he’d be better off getting playing time on the sophomore team than sitting on the bench with the varsity.

“I believe it worked out OK.”

Plaques, proclamations and other mementos from a long career in coaching share wall space with a signed, poster-sized photo of MJ in Lynch’s cramped office — he’s also Laney’s athletic director. The gym bears Jordan’s name — Michael J. Jordan Gymnasium — and a larger-than-life, center-court silhouette of the Nike-designed Jumpman figure is hard to miss. Lynch has a small private stash of MJ memorabilia, ruefully noting that whatever had been

displayed often wound up stolen, including a Laney game jersey anonymously returned with a biblical passage seeking forgiveness.

“These kids ... they’ve seen highlights, they’ve probably seen his commercials, but none of them have seen him play,” said Lynch, a tinge of sadness in his voice. “They don’t really relate to him. That was a long time ago.”

But surely he uses the legend of MJ as a teaching tool.

“Not really,” he said. “What Mike had ... the talent, the work ethic, the will to win ... you either have it or you don’t. It can’t be taught.”

No, it can’t, so Wilmington does not appear to try terribly hard. The town doesn’t overwhelm a visitor with MJ lore.

Signs at the city limits acknowledge the North Carolina Azalea Festival, not the hometown of Michael Jordan.

He is a presence at the Cape Fear Museum of History and Science, a first-floor display case chronicling his life from kindergarten to the Bulls, including a college anthropology paper detailing his 1984 Olympics experience. Dr. James Peacock gave him a B-plus and advised him to seek a publisher; with one caveat: “Suggest [you] delete comments about Coach Knight ...”

The regular breakfast group at Whitey’s Restaurant — Howard, Bruce, Stacy, Louie, Robert, Larry and Bobby — sure, they like Mike, but they point out that Wilmington has produced a number of fine athletes: tennis player Althea Gibson, Harlem Globetrotter Meadowlark Lemon, football players Sonny Jurgensen, Roman Gabriel and Clyde Simmons and baseball player Trot Nixon.

Larry — retired Wilmington firefighter Larry Brown — lost most of his eyesight rescuing three people from a burning building years back. He sort of defines “hero” to his breakfast buddies.

Newsmen David Brinkley and Charles Kuralt were from Wilmington, the boys note, as is actress Linda Lavin. And the table talk this day centers on Kristen Dalton, the 22-year-old Wilmingtonian who represented the U.S. in the previous night’s Miss Universe pageant.

Proprietor Whitey Prevatte has a unique link to MJ. He signed his first paycheck in 1980 when Jordan worked on the maintenance crew at the recently shuttered El Berta Motor Inn, which adjoins the restaurant.

“Three thirty-five an hour,” Whitey declared, displaying a framed copy of a check for \$119.76. “Minimum wage at the time. It’s a little higher now, so I tell his momma if Mike wants to come back, we could probably pay him a little more.”

“Momma” is Deloris Jordan, who was a customer while working as a teller at United Carolina Bank up Market Street.

“She called me up and asked me if I might have anything for Mike,” Whitey said. “I said, ‘Deloris, you send him over, and we’ll find something.’ That woman is a jewel of a person. Now she travels the world raising money for the needy.”

Whitey thought enough of her son — “nice kid, good worker, dependable” — to offer input on his college choice.

“I told Deloris, if he were my son, I’d send him to Carolina,” Whitey said. “That Dean Smith always impressed me as a fine man and a fine coach.”

Parker recalled the Laney players meeting all the college coaches who came by for a look at MJ.

“[Jim] Valvano, Lefty Driesell ... Roy Williams [then a North Carolina assistant] spent so much time down here, we thought he was working at Laney.

“Then Dean Smith showed up, in this powder-blue suit, and it was over: If Dean Smith shows up, Carolina really wants you.”

So basketball’s gain was baseball’s loss? Not really.

“He never made an all-star team for me, and his talent didn’t jump out at you the way it did in basketball, but give me nine Mike Jordans and you’d have to bring your ‘A’ game to beat me,” said Dick Neher, Jordan’s coach for three years.

Neher, a proud former Marine, worked at the General Electric plant with James Jordan, Michael’s father.

Neher’s walls bear witness to a lifetime involvement with youth baseball, and he was a meticulous record-keeper: Mike “Rabbit” Jordan batted .275 for Parker’s Drugs as a toothpick-armed 14-year-old outfielder/first baseman (with a little pitching and emergency catching).

Rabbit? Neher believed nicknames helped foster team harmony. Jordan was known as “Rabbit” because of the peculiar cut of his ears.

“I don’t think he ever would have had enough bat speed to play in the big leagues — he had this big, sweeping swing, so he couldn’t catch up to a good fastball,” Neher offered in an oft-repeated scouting report.

But those intangibles.

“Terrific competitor, great teammate, kept everyone loose,” Neher said. “One time I had to use him as an emergency catcher. He was having trouble making the throw to second while we were warming up, and the other team was all over him — ‘We’re going to run on this rag arm.’ Mike took his mask off and looked over at them with this big smile on his face. ‘If you run, I will gun’ — the throw got down there on one hop, but I think he nailed four out of five.”

Todd Parker has to smile as he points out MJ’s inscription in their senior yearbook: “To a guy I think is the toughest white boy in the state ... good luck in the future.”

Said Parker: “It was surreal watching him, what he’d become, and thinking you’d been out there with him. You bet I’m proud of him. I wish he hadn’t gone off to play baseball. The Bulls would have won eight in a row if he hadn’t.

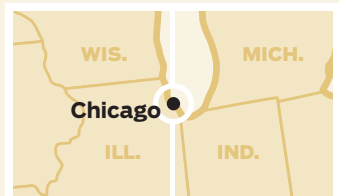
“And I wish he didn’t come back to play for the Wizards. That shot against Utah was the perfect ending.”

May 5, 1984: After winning the Naismith and Wooden college player of the year awards, Jordan turns pro after his junior season at North Carolina. He finishes his college career with an average of 17.7 points per game and 54 percent shooting.

June 19, 1984: The day Sam Bowie became a trivia answer. In perhaps the most infamous of NBA drafts and the most celebrated day in Bulls history, Jordan is selected third overall behind Hakeem Olajuwon and Bowie.



Summer 1984: During the Olympic Games in Los Angeles, Jordan combines with Ewing and Mullin to lead the U.S. team to a gold medal. Jordan averages 17.1 points per game for the team coached by Bob Knight.



1984-85

Oct. 26, 1984: Wearing a No. 23 Bulls jersey for the first time, Jordan scores 16 points in his NBA debut, a 109-93 victory against the Washington Bullets in Chicago Stadium. After the game the rookie said, “While fans expect me to score a lot, I am quite satisfied to be a decoy.”

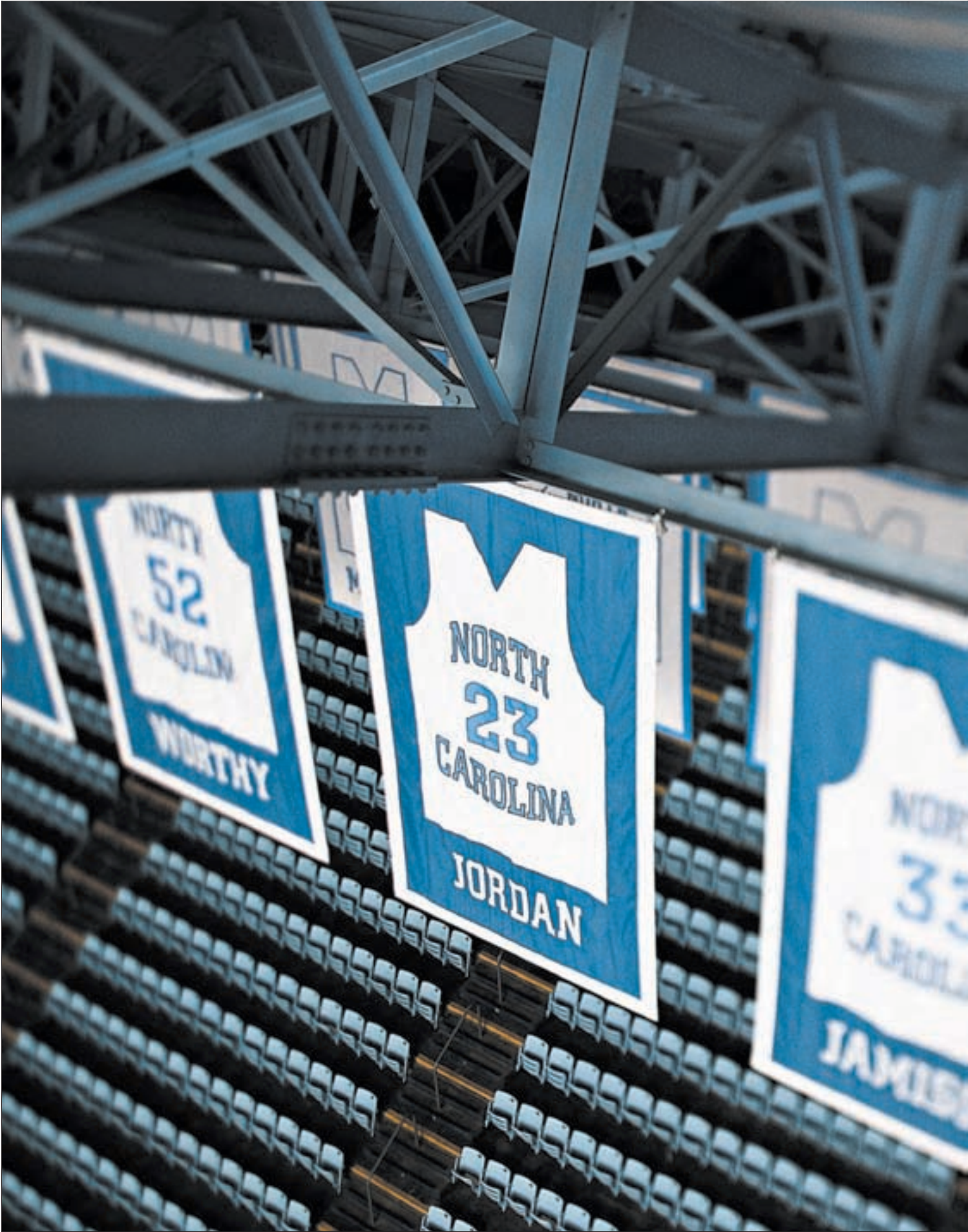
Nov. 17, 1984: Footwear will never be the same again. Jordan debuts the first of his signature line of sneakers in a game against the 76ers. The red-black-and-white shoes violate league policy, and Nike pays the fine for Jordan. The Air Jordan I becomes available to the public in 1985.

Dec. 10, 1984: Jordan appears on Sports Illustrated’s cover, elevating under the hoop in his red Bulls uniform, under the headline “A Star is Born.”

Feb. 10, 1985: Jordan makes his All-Star Game debut. Controversy arises with talk of a “freeze-out” supposedly led by Pistons star Isiah Thomas to keep the ball away from the popular rookie. Thomas later denies this was intentional. Jordan shoots 2-for-9, scoring seven points in 22 minutes of play.

April 24, 1985: Jordan scores 35 points in his first playoff victory, a 109-107 win in Game 3 of the first round against the Milwaukee Bucks.

Chapel Hill



At a school where basketball is religion, Michael Jordan took the team to new glories. BRIAN CASSELLA/TRIBUNE PHOTO

Jordan becomes a Tar Heel: ‘He’s the gold standard for Carolina basketball’

A poster-sized reproduction of Sports Illustrated’s cover for its 1981-82 college basketball preview issue hangs above the replica playing floor at the Carolina Basketball Museum, which is a site to behold. College hoops might not have been invented here, but the Tar Heels’ stately shrine to their own excellence surely suggests it was perfected here.

North Carolina was SI’s pick to win the ’82 NCAA tournament, and the cover jinx didn’t hold — the magazine got it right.

The cover photo suggests a missing-man formation in that it includes only four players: James Worthy, Sam Perkins, Jimmy Black and Matt Doherty, returning starters from a 29-8 Tar Heels team that lost to Indiana in the ’81 title game.

Buzz Peterson was supposed to be the fifth. The slick-shooting guard from Asheville had been prep Player of the Year in Carolina in 1980-81, but an SI cover would have been a bit much given coach Dean Smith’s aversion to publicizing freshmen.

Besides, anyone who had seen or heard about the Tar Heels’ informal preseason scrimmages knew otherwise.

“I watched one day, and I came back and told the other coaches, ‘I think I’ve just seen the best 6-4 player I’ve ever seen,’ ” said Roy Williams, then a Carolina assistant who took over as head coach in 2003 after a 15-year apprenticeship at Kansas.

If his fellow staffers were skeptical, it was understandable. Williams, a fourth-year assistant, had less seniority than longtime Smith aides Bill Guthridge and Eddie Fogler, and he had recruited the player he was so high on: Mike Jordan, a lesser-known 6-foot-4-inch guard from Wilmington, N.C.

“You try not to get carried away,” Williams said, “but even then he had so many intangibles to go with that explosive talent. The work ethic, the toughness, the competitiveness. ... You just sensed he had a chance to be something special.”

Buzz Peterson’s early take: “I’m thinking I better find a new position.”

But an obvious truth engendered no

bitterness; the two were roommates as well as teammates and remain close.

And sure enough, 18-year-old Mike Jordan seized the starting spot with the ferocity and flair that would characterize his play for nearly two decades. He scored the first two points of the season in a 74-67 victory over Kansas, and the last two on perhaps the most storied bucket in Carolina history: an 18-foot jumper from the left wing that beat Georgetown 63-62 in the Louisiana Superdome for Dean Smith’s first national championship.

Along the way there were increasingly frequent glimpses of the once-in-a-lifetime player he would become ... Michael Jordan, not Mike.

“That was Coach Smith’s doing,” recalled Carolina historian Rick Brewer, then the school’s media relations director. “In Wilmington he was Mike, and most of our players called him Mike. Coach Smith always called him Michael. I asked him which he preferred, and he said it didn’t matter. So we went with Coach Smith’s choice. Rolled off the tongue a little better.”

Jordan had ambition to match his talent.

“We used to kill our guys in pre-season conditioning drills, really try to bury them so they’d welcome being in the gym,” Williams said. “Michael and I were talking one day as they were cooling down after some strenuous running and he told me, ‘I want to be the best guy who ever played here.’ I said, ‘Well, Michael, you’ve got a chance to be a great player; but you’re going to have to work awfully hard.’ He said, ‘What do you mean? I work as hard as anyone.’ And I said, ‘That’s just it. You’re at a different level now. As hard as anyone won’t get it done — you’ve got to work even harder.’

“Next day he came in and it was like, ‘I’m going to show you.’ From that point on he tried to win every sprint, every drill, dominate every scrimmage.

“And the only thing he did better than play was talk. Whether it was basketball or pool or cards or golf later on, if he was competing, he was going to win. And he was going to tell you about it.”

Peterson can attest: “He came home with me for a weekend one time and he was yappin’ to my mom about beating her at cards. Probably cheated her; just to win.”

As can Worthy. “I used to hide from him,” he said. “Every day, no matter how hard we practiced, Mike wanted to play one-on-one. I was pretty much regarded as the best player on the team, and he wanted to test himself. ‘Come on, Junior, I’m going to take you today,’ and he’d have stayed out there all night until he did.”

Still, the young Jordan knew his place on a talented, veteran team.

“He carried the bags, did all the freshman things, made every effort to blend in,” Perkins said. “He was a confident player; but he understood that it was team first. And you couldn’t deny his talent. It was pretty clear he was going to be instrumental in what we were trying to do.”

That would be win a national championship, the one omission from Smith’s glittering résumé. Already a coaching icon, he had never cut down the nets in six previous trips to the Final Four. The Tar Heels were 27-2, ACC regular-season and tournament champions and the top-ranked team in the country heading into the ’82 NCAA tournament.

“Mike was the missing piece,” Worthy said. “Coach Smith did a great job bringing him along. By tournament time he was ready to blossom.”

Thirty-two seconds remained in the title game when Smith called a rare timeout after Sleepy Floyd’s basket had given Georgetown a 62-61 lead. The noise from the crowd of 61,612 inside the Superdome suggested a jet engine at full power.

Worthy was a 6-9 power forward, strong and quick, a two-time All-American and national Player of the Year whom the

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Dean Smith

It ‘stood out how hard he worked’

CHAPEL HILL — Dean Smith, ever the coach, remembers what happened in the immediate aftermath of Michael Jordan’s title-clinching shot over Georgetown in 1982 just as vividly as the shot itself.

“Georgetown turned it over because Michael got back on defense and made a play in the passing lane,” said Smith, describing the infamously errant toss that denied the Hoyas a final shot. “Freddy Brown threw the ball to James Worthy because Michael jumped in front of the guy he was trying to pass to.”

Smith was speaking in a modest first-floor office in the imposing 21,750-seat campus arena that bears his name. He won 839 games and two national titles during his 36 years as the Tar Heels’ coach, and All-Americans and future NBA stars were as much a staple of Carolina basketball as tobacco was of Carolina agriculture.

With those wry, twinkling eyes and the distinctive nose, Dean Smith remains the face of Carolina basketball 12 years after he stepped aside as the coach. Asking him to rank his stars would be like asking him to rank his grandchildren. Not going to happen.

“One thing about Michael that stood out was how hard he worked,” Smith said, sipping a Diet Coke. “We expected he’d get better because of that, and he did, year after year. A player with that kind of talent who works as hard as Michael did has a chance to do great things, and he was smart about it. He’d listen closely to what the coaches said and then go do it.”

The Jordan display in the Carolina Basketball Museum contains two letters from Smith suggesting things MJ should work on in the off-season. There is no mention of the Georgetown shot in the 1982 letter, or of his first-team All-America recognition in 1983’s. Just eight ways to become a better ballplayer in each.

The best ever? Smith’s smile suggests silent affirmation.

“He certainly belongs in the Hall of Fame,” he said. “I don’t know that anybody ever combined the physical and the mental sides with the effort the way Michael did. Tiger Woods, maybe.”

—Dan McGrath



In 2007, at a ceremony honoring North Carolina’s national championship teams, Jordan shows his affection for Dean Smith. AP FILE PHOTO

Smith’s advice to his former pupil

Near the end of the 1982-83 school year, UNC coach Dean Smith wrote a letter to Michael Jordan, detailing parts of his game he should work on over the summer. For instance, he advised: “Shoot the ball the same way each time, the same arc. ... In pick-up games, try to be a point guard, working on your dribbling and starting the ball low. ... Don’t always reach for the ball but contain your man.” In conclusion, Smith wrote, “Michael, if you do improve on these items we mentioned, you will be a much better basketball player. ... In your daydreaming, picture us winning it all in Seattle!”



Chapel Hill

“Coach Smith patted Mike on the butt and said, ‘Knock it down, Michael’ — he’s a freshman, remember. Mike got this look in his eye and kind of smiled. He was excited, not nervous.”



Jordan launches the jumper that is perhaps the most storied bucket in Carolina history: It beat Georgetown 63-62 for the 1982 NCAA championship. AP FILE PHOTO

Continued from **Previous Page**

Lakers would choose with the first pick in the 1982 NBA draft. Accordingly, the deciding play was designed for him — he had 28 points on 13-for-17 shooting — but Smith knew Georgetown’s alley-fighter defense would prioritize denying Worthy the ball.

Perkins, a long-armed, left-handed center known as “Big Smooth,” was not a bad second option, but 6-11 shot-blocker Patrick Ewing loomed over his shoulder in the low post.

“We always tried to move the ball quickly enough to find the gaps in the defense,” Worthy said, “so if I was covered and Sam was covered in that set, we’d reverse it to Mike on the wing.”

Where Smith knew he had a third option. “As we were breaking the huddle,” Worthy said, “Coach Smith patted Mike on the butt and said, ‘Knock it down, Michael’ — he’s a freshman, remember: Mike got this look in his eye and kind of smiled. He was excited, not nervous.”

And he delivered, with the cold-blooded self-assurance that would define his play in dozens of game-deciding situations over the next 20 years.

A freshman, remember.

Later that evening, on Bourbon Street, Jordan and Peterson observed Carolina rooters’ long-suppressed revelry. “Mike looks at me and he says, ‘I guess that was a pretty big shot I made,’” Peterson recalled. “I said, ‘Buddy, that was a huge shot, believe me.’”

“Knock it down, Michael” is memorialized in a spot of honor on the museum floor, along with several other big shots in Carolina history. Results notwithstanding, it might not have been MJ’s signature effort.

“With about three minutes to go, Georgetown was making a real run at us — they got a six- or seven-point lead down to one,” Worthy recalled. “Mike drove on Patrick and went over him with this left-handed finger roll and scored. I don’t know how he got it over him. Changed the momentum of the game.”

Perkins recalled a play against Maryland in February as MJ’s breakthrough moment.

“They had a pretty good team, and it was a close game, back and forth,” he said. “I blocked a shot and got it to Mike, and he took off and made this windmill dunk over Ben Coleman, who was about 6-10. That’s when I think people started to talk about Michael Jordan.”

And after the Georgetown shot they rarely stopped.

“Every accomplishment made him more confident, and also more competitive — he wanted more, and he never lost that hunger,” Williams said. “The Georgetown shot took his confidence to another level. He came back for his sophomore year knowing he’d be a marked man, so to speak, and he wanted to prove he was up to it. ACC Player of the Year, defensive Player of the Year, national Player of the Year — he just kept getting better.”

Carolina, oddly, did not: The Tar Heels went 28-8 and lost to Georgia in the East Regional finals in Jordan’s sophomore year. They took a 27-2 record and the No. 1 ranking into the ’84 tournament, but Indiana stunned them in the East Regional semifinals as MJ encountered foul trouble and a poor shooting night: 13 points on 6-for-14 shooting in 26 minutes in his final college game.

“That was probably one of the best Carolina teams ever, too,” Peterson recalled ruefully. “But the NCAA tournament is one and done, and if you don’t have it for

40 minutes, somebody can get you. Indiana got us.”

Steve Alford, an Indiana freshman, hit the Tar Heels with 27 points, but it was fellow guard Dan Dakich whom CBS analyst Billy Packer tried to immortalize, raving about his defensive work on Jordan. Dakich, who went on to a coaching career and now hosts a radio talk show in Indianapolis, enjoys reliving his 40 minutes of fame.

“Game’s over, I go for Steve Alford, who was great ... hug the hero and you’re on TV, right?” Dakich said. “This lady from CBS grabs Steve, and then she says they want to talk to me. I’m thinking, ‘What for?’

“So Billy Packer says, ‘How’d you stop Michael Jordan?’ Truthfully, I didn’t know I had, but if he wanted to say I did. ... Then I said something really dumb like, ‘It wasn’t that hard.’

“Of course, he was not yet Michael Jordan. He was really good, but he wasn’t Michael Jordan. And we were Indiana. We didn’t think it was an upset. We expected to win games like that.”

With Smith’s blessing, Jordan declared for the NBA draft after his junior year: The Bulls chose him in the first round, No. 3 overall behind Hakeem Olajuwon to Houston and Sam Bowie to Portland.

And after a star turn as the leading scorer on the gold-medal-winning ’84 U.S. Olympic team, it was on to the NBA, which had never seen the likes of him.

“We didn’t think about the pros much because Coach Smith kept us focused on schoolwork and trying to win the ACC,” said Perkins, who went to Dallas at No. 4 in the same draft. “I thought Mike would be a good pro because the game suited his skills, but I’d be lying if I said I knew he was going to become the player he became. He just manhandled the NBA. That was all Mike.”

Peterson caught a glimpse of Jordan’s NBA future on a tour of Europe before their sophomore year.

“He got 34 on an Italian team that had Scott May,” he said, “and the next game he went for 34 again against a team of pros from Yugoslavia. He was already a handful for the older guys, pros like Walter Davis and Al Wood, when we played in the summer: I said to Coach Williams, ‘I think

UNC		PER GAME AVERAGES				
		SEASONS	GAMES	FG%	POINTS	REBS. ASTS.
1981-82	34	53.4	13.5	4.4	1.8	
1982-83	36	53.5	20.0	5.5	1.6	
1983-84	31	55.1	19.6	5.3	2.1	
Totals	101	54.0	17.7	5.0	1.8	

my roommate is going to be like Dr. J some day.”

Williams saw an insatiable drive for betterment that was first displayed in Wilmington, in one-on-one games with older brother Larry on the Jordan backyard court at 4647 Gordon Road.

“We thought he’d be a good NBA player; possibly an All-Star, but none of us knew he was going to be able to do what he eventually did — I certainly did not predict it,” Williams said. “But one of the reasons he became Michael Jordan is he continued to work at it.

“He was back here after his rookie year: Averaged 28 a game, won Rookie of the Year; but he was almost strictly a driver. He said, ‘What do I have to do to get better?’ I said, ‘You need to work on your outside shot. They’re going to play you to deny you the drive, so if you can knock down the outside shot when it’s there, they’ll have to respect that and you’ll be illegal.’

“You look at the shots he made over the years, when he made them. ... I’d say he became a pretty good shooter.”

Williams was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2007, the eighth Tar Heel honored. He plans to be in Springfield, Mass., when MJ becomes the ninth.

“People around here heard me talk about Tyler Hansbrough for four years,” Williams said of the three-time All-American and 2008 Player of the Year who led the Tar Heels to the 2009 national championship. “His work ethic and his effort and his competitiveness ... they probably got tired of hearing me talk about it. I’m proud of Tyler and what he did, just like I’m proud of all our guys.

“But Michael, he’s the gold standard for Carolina basketball.”



“A player with that kind of talent who works as hard as Michael did has a chance to do great things,” says Dean Smith (at right in a 1983 game). AP FILE PHOTO

April 26, 1985: The Bulls are eliminated by the Bucks three games to one. Jordan averages 29.3 points.

May 1985: Jordan is named NBA Rookie of the Year after averaging 28.2 points and playing all 82 games. “I feel like I know I did the right thing coming out of school early,” he said at the end of the season.

1985-86

Oct. 29, 1985: Jordan breaks a bone in his left foot in the third game of his second season and misses 64 games. The Bulls win 30 games despite his absence and snag a playoff berth.

March 15, 1986: Jordan returns to action, scoring 12 points in 13 minutes during a 125-116 loss to the Bucks. His minutes slowly increase through the remainder of the season.

April 20, 1986: In Game 2 of the first round, Jordan torches the Celtics for a postseason-record 63 points in a 135-131 double-overtime loss at Boston Garden. “I think it’s just God disguised as Michael Jordan,” Celtics great Larry Bird said.

April 22, 1986: The Bulls are eliminated from the playoffs in three games by the Celtics.

Summer 1986: Jordan, who was nine credits shy of graduating when he left for the NBA, returns to North Carolina to earn his degree in geography.

1986-87

Nov. 1, 1986: Setting the tone for the season, Jordan scores 50 points in the Bulls’ opener — a 108-103 victory against the New York Knicks.

Feb. 7, 1987: At the All-Star Game in Seattle, Jordan soars to his first of back-to-back dunk contest victories.

April 16, 1987: After dropping 61 points in a loss to the Atlanta Hawks, Jordan becomes the only player other than Wilt Chamberlain to score more than 3,000 points in a season. He also sets a league record by scoring 23 straight points in the game and becomes the second player (after Chamberlain) to score 50 or more points in three consecutive games.

April 28, 1987: For the second straight season, the Bulls are swept in three games by the Boston Celtics.

May 1987: Jordan wins the first of his 10 NBA scoring titles (37.1 points per game). He would go on to win the award the next six seasons—a feat that matched Chamberlain’s record.

1987-88

Feb. 6, 1988: With hometown fans cheering in Chicago Stadium, Jordan and Dominique Wilkins go toe-to-toe in the dunk contest. Jordan wins, recording a perfect score with a slam that lifted off at the free throw line.



Jordan faces Isiah Thomas (right) in an exhibition game between the U.S. Olympic team and former Indiana University players in the summer of 1984. TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

Los Angeles

At the '84 Olympics, Jordan leads the U.S. to gold—and also wins over Bob Knight

On one side of the chalkboard inside the locker room of the Forum, Bob Knight had posted his defensive reminders for the U.S. Olympic men's basketball team. On the other side were instructions for Knight's patented motion offense.

This was ground Knight typically covered minutes before tipoff. But Aug. 10, 1984, was no ordinary night in the City of Angels or across America. This was the moment U.S. basketball had been waiting for since 1976, the last time Americans had played for a gold medal in the Olympics, in Montreal.

As Knight walked in, wearing his familiar mask of intensity, he noticed his players' heads were uncharacteristically down — all except Michael Jordan's.

Between his offensive and defensive game plans was a yellow sheet of legal paper: "Coach," it said, "don't worry. We've put up with too much s--- to lose now."

If the handwriting wasn't recognizable, Knight knew the tone was signature Jordan. Somewhere, Knight still has that sheet of paper.

"I looked at it, and only Jordan would write something like that," Knight recalled in a phone interview from his Lubbock, Texas, office. "After that, I knew we were ready. So all I said to them was, 'All right, go get the gold medal.'"

Before the tip, Knight sensed Jordan's teammates would respond, telling assistant coaches Don Donoher and C.M. Newton the game would be decided in the first five minutes.

And it was. The U.S. relentlessly attacked Spain in a 96-65 victory to make the Jordan-led team the last American amateur men's basketball team to win gold. Jordan, Knight's captain, had a game-high 20 points.

"Everybody on that team realized how much pressure was on us to win gold, and the only way we could have lost that game was if we were uptight," said Steve Alford, a member of that team. "So Michael doing what he did, writing that note to coach, was a great way to break the ice and erase all the tension."

Alford, now coaching at New Mexico, knew Knight as well as any 1984 Olympian after having just completed his freshman season at Indiana. Playing for the complex, demanding coach is a walk through an emotional minefield. Alford marveled at how deftly Jordan navigated his way with Knight.

"There's nobody else on that team who could have pulled [the note] off, I can tell you that," Alford said. "Michael was able to get away with it because somehow he could get to coach and make him laugh."

Today, Knight calls Jordan "the greatest player ever in a team sport," comparing him to Babe Ruth and Jim Brown.

But back in the spring of 1984, the irascible coach had seen the tape on Jordan and had heard what his dear friend, then-North Carolina coach Dean Smith, had told him. And when Knight had seen Jordan with his own eyes, Indiana's Dan Dakich was on his way to becoming a folk hero after holding Jordan to 13 points in the Hoosiers'

NCAA East Regional semifinals win over Jordan's Tar Heels.

So on the eve of the start of Olympic tryouts, Knight was curious to see which Jordan would report to Bloomington, Ind., with 73 other college players.

Jordan quickly earned Knight's trust, not necessarily for what he did on the court but for how he did it. Of all of Jordan's skills, Knight believes the greatest was his will to win. Jordan was demanding of himself and his teammates — in that order — and Knight quickly sensed he could trust Jordan enough to pull him aside.

"I remember telling Mike very early, 'I'm going to get on your ass and some days you may not understand why,'" said Knight, the winningest college basketball coach ever after a career at Army, Indiana and Texas Tech. "I'm going to say something to you and the ears of the other guys are going to perk up, and they're going to say, 'Damn, if he will be like that with Jordan then I better take care of my [game].'" And he was fine with that. That's the direction the team took in large part because of him. This was his team, and that's why I made him the captain."

One day during at an Olympic practice before the June NBA draft, Knight remembered standing next to an NBA team executive, whom he refuses to identify.

"I was standing next to my friend as we watched us practice and I said, 'You're luckier than anybody could be in basketball, you have a chance to get Jordan,'" Knight said. "He said, 'Yeah, Bob, he's great, but we need a big man.' And I told him, 'Play Jordan at center and he'll lead the league in scoring. He's that good.'"

Jordan practiced like he was playing for a medal — at the end of practice. It impressed his teammates and Knight, whose practices were notoriously grueling, his reputation for being difficult on players well-earned. As Wayman Tisdale once described Knight's approach to the Los Angeles Times: "Bobby Knight was a raging maniac. He put us through pure hell."

The final roster — Jordan, Alford, Tisdale, Leon Wood, Patrick Ewing, Vern Fleming, Alvin Robertson, Joe Kleine, Jon Koncak, Chris Mullin, Sam Perkins and

Jeffrey Turner — weren't necessarily the most talented players. They were the most compatible with Knight's coaching.

As promised, Knight held Jordan to an even higher standard. Jordan was coming off an All-American career at North Carolina, months away from NBA stardom. None of that mattered to Knight. Jordan once cracked that while Dean Smith was the master of the four-corner offense, Bob Knight was the master of the four-letter word.

A bond developed between Jordan and Knight, so much so that Jordan invited him to his first Bulls retirement ceremony, in 1993. They traded laughs and stories, less than a decade from their Olympic experience that made Jordan stronger because, well, as the saying goes, it didn't kill him.

Those months under Knight felt so long, Jordan couldn't envision four years of it. He bet Alford \$100 that Alford wouldn't finish his college career at Indiana. After the Hoosiers won the 1987 national title in Alford's senior season, Jordan paid up.

"I think all the work we put in helped Michael establish a special bond with coach," Alford said. "I mean, we were practicing three times a day during parts of that three-month time frame. My eyes were wide open. I was a college freshman soaking all this in. Michael had a humility to him, a passion, and was no prima donna."

Peter Ueberroth, the organizer of the 1984 Games, cherishes many memories from that summer.

Carl Lewis raising his arms triumphantly after winning four gold medals. Mary Lou Retton smiling widely after becoming the first gymnast outside Eastern Europe to win gold in the all-around.

The men's basketball Olympic gold.

And what Ueberroth remembers most about Jordan is the way the budding superstar handled himself away from the glare.

"Michael was so respectful and kind with everyone he came across, everybody behind the scenes who would help, that it made an impression that this was somebody who had time for everybody," Ueberroth said. "He was still so young at that point (21) that I even think he might have been a little awe-struck at everything. He fit in. He was a great star who didn't try to steal the limelight. We were blessed to have him part of it."

In Ueberroth's eyes, Jordan's 1984 team holds a special place among Olympic basketball champions because it was the last



U.S. players hoist coach Bob Knight after the team won the gold-medal game over Spain in the 1984 Olympics. Of Jordan, Knight said: "I was fortunate to coach him." UPI FILE PHOTO

collection of amateurs to win gold. After the '88 team lost to the Soviet Union in Seoul, professionals were allowed in and the '92 Dream Team was born — with Jordan leading the way again.

"I think because of what happened, the '84 team always will have a distinction the others don't," Ueberroth said.

Members of the 1960 U.S. team led by Jerry West may debate that. Knight considers any comparison to the '60 team, coached by his mentor, Pete Newell, the ultimate compliment. But Knight bristles at any mention of the Soviet Union's boycott of the 1984 Games lessening the gold Jordan and Company won.

"I have one word to say about the Russians," Knight said in his final interview at the '84 Games. Typical Knight, he had many words. "You people have never seen the Russians play, and I've been watching them for two years. The Russians wouldn't have won here. They can't play defense. They couldn't have beaten some of the teams in this tournament, and if you guys don't know that, you're not as smart as I think ... and I don't think you're too smart, anyway."

Russians or no Russians, you didn't have to be a descendant of James Naismith to know Michael Jordan left Los Angeles with a gold medal around his neck and the world at his feet.

"The way I look at it, I was fortunate to coach him," Knight said. "And I looked forward to coaching him every single day."

1984 Olympics

The case of the forgotten jersey

LOS ANGELES — Michael Jordan was in position to win gold at the 1984 Summer Olympics only because of some quick police work by one of L.A.'s finest.

About an hour before tipoff, Jordan realized he had forgotten his jersey in his room at the Olympic Village on the campus of the University of Southern California.

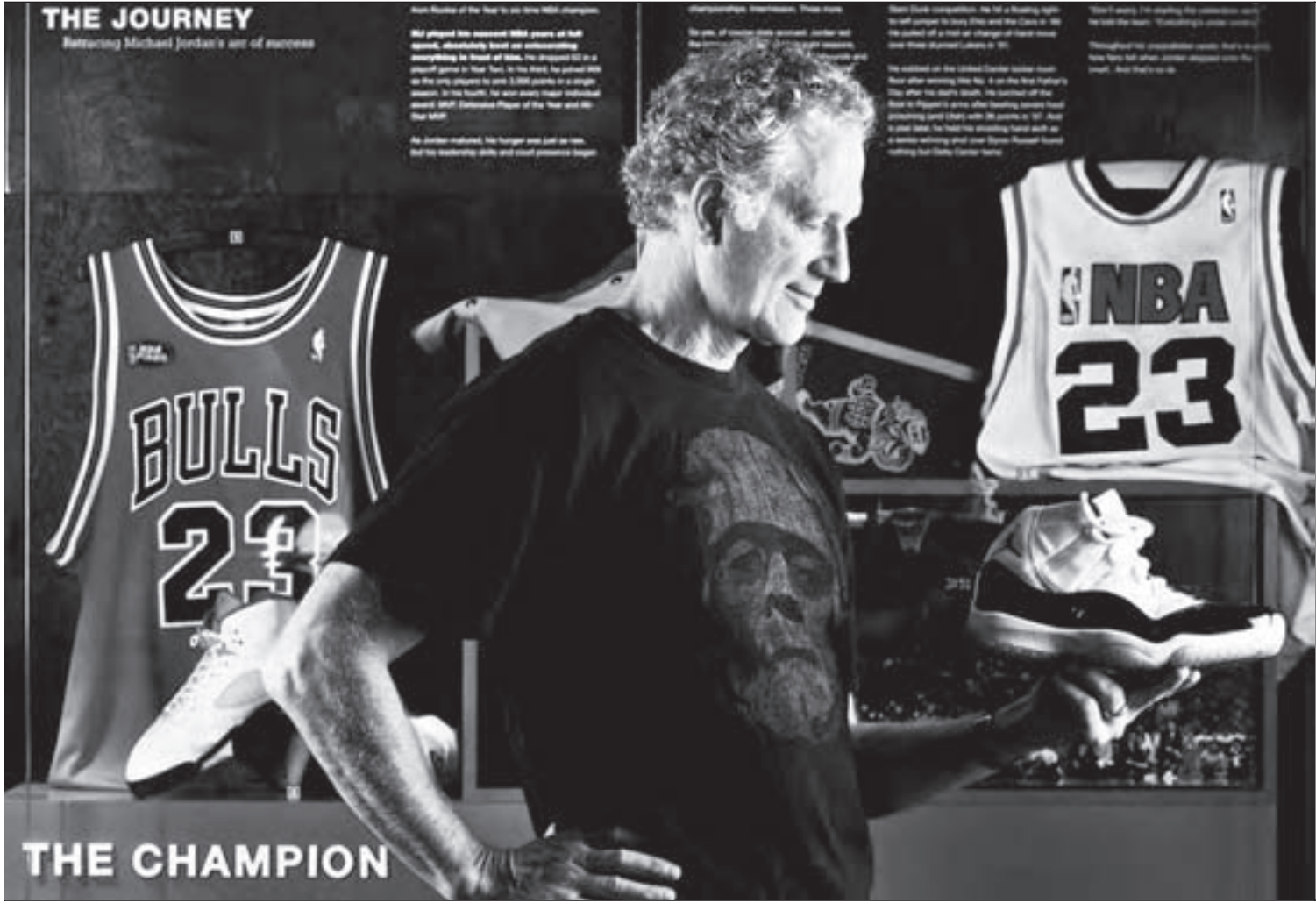
The Forum, where the gold-medal game would be played, was in Inglewood, 15 miles away. Jordan had to have his No. 9 jersey; there were no replacements.

An Inglewood patrolman went to USC to retrieve the jersey but was denied entry to the Village. About the same time, Los Angeles police Sgt. Emilio Perez happened by the complex.

Perez rushed the jersey to the Forum just in time for MJ to carry the U.S. to a gold medal. The moment allowed Jordan to achieve a goal he'd had since he was a 13-year-old boy in Wilmington, N.C., watching point guard Quinn Buckner dance after leading the U.S. to Olympic gold in Montreal.

—David Haugh

Beaverton



Tinker Hatfield at Nike's offices in Oregon. He is the primary designer for the Air Jordan line. **BRUCE ELY/PHOTO FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

What begins as a simple (and reluctant) shoe deal becomes a cultural phenomenon

It was just a thin, dark stripe.

It spread only a few inches across the top of the toe line of the white leather Air Jordan X, but it was wide enough and long enough for Michael Jordan to put his foot down.

“We were in a hotel room, and Michael takes one look at the shoe and said, ‘I hate it,’” recalled Tinker Hatfield, Nike’s vice president of innovation and the primary designer for the Air Jordan line. “I was kind of taken aback by it. I was like, he should just be thankful I kept it going because he wasn’t playing basketball anymore.”

By David Haugh

This was the summer of 1994. The recently retired Bull was chasing curveballs for the Birmingham Barons. The prevailing thought around Nike was that Jordan would never wear his signature shoes on an NBA court again.

“Phil Knight was really sad,” Hatfield said of Nike’s chairman. “He thought, ‘Now he’s going to be a baseball player.’”

Once Hatfield had finished the shoe and authorized production of the first run, he tracked down Jordan to show him the results. Hatfield was proud, particularly of the 10 bands on the sole that included a phrase about Jordan’s accomplishments.

Jordan was unimpressed. “Part of it was Michael wasn’t involved in any of the Air Jordan X,” Hatfield said. “About the tip of the shoe, he said, ‘I hate that a lot,’ and [he] got upset: ‘If that shoe doesn’t sell as many as the year before, you’re making up the difference out of your pocket.’”

Hatfield quickly returned to Nike headquarters. “We have a problem,” he told his team. Jordan’s demand to have the stripe removed — which would require re-starting production halfway through — had never been done at Nike.

“That was the first and last time,” Hatfield said. “It ended up selling OK so I was off the hook.”

Hatfield just shook his head and laughed as he shot a glance at the giant mural of Jordan, MJ keeping watch on his designer as a constant reminder of the keen eye the world’s most famous athlete keeps on Nike business involving his name.

Jordan has never been a silent partner in his role as endorser extraordinaire for Nike, a fact now appreciated more than tolerated.

“I think Tinker and our design team and Nike, as a general rule, prefer to deal with athletes who have strong opinions about what he or she wants, and [Jordan] certainly has that,” Knight told the Tribune during a visit to the sprawling Nike campus.

Knight built Blue Ribbon Sports, which made \$3,240 in its first year of operation in 1964, into Nike, a sports and commercial powerhouse responsible for \$19.2 billion in revenues last year. He rarely grants interviews but made an exception to talk about Jordan, the 21-year-old kid who preferred Converse and Adidas over Nikes when Knight first asked him to try on a pair in 1984.

They have grown close over the quarter-century that followed. Knight has been there for the ups — when the Bulls won Jordan’s first NBA championship in 1991.

And he has been there for the downs — the funeral of Jordan’s father, James, in 1993. Knight describes the sight of a weeping Jordan as seeing “Superman in tears.”

Of all the special times, Knight’s fondest memory is of an ordinary moment savored by his extraordinary friend.

1992. Jordan had won his second NBA title and a gold medal with the Dream Team in Barcelona. Knight treated some members of that team to a Hawaiian vacation. A jet-lagged Jordan walked through the airport in Hawaii holding youngest son Marcus, a toddler at the time, on his shoulders as the boy drooled all over Jordan’s bald head.

Jordan just kept walking — and smiling. “He had the biggest grin on his face and I was thinking, here is someone as successful as a man can be. Michael Jordan, family man, human being,” Knight said. “That was just a warm memory for me.”

There have been countless others for Knight during a corporate and cultural odyssey alongside Jordan that has resulted in a legendary shoe line and, now, Jordan Brand, a division of Nike.

“One of the things I’m most proud of as a businessman is how we took an endorsement — albeit a great endorsement — and turned it into a brand,” Knight said. “It certainly hasn’t been done at this level anywhere before. Five years after he was done playing, the Jordan Brand [sold] more than when he [was] playing.”

For the first time since it was established 12 years ago, Jordan Brand is on track to sell \$1 billion worth of merchandise.

“How far can this brand go?” Knight asked rhetorically. “Clearly it can be much bigger than it is now.”



Nike CEO Phil Knight on Jordan: “You go through all the ups and downs, the trials and the struggles. ... It’s been a fabulous ride.” **JACK SMITH/AP PHOTO**

Jordan never could have envisioned that kind of commercial success when he begrudgingly visited Nike’s corporate headquarters, then just a few buildings outside Portland, Ore.

In the fall of ’84, Jordan had just signed his rookie contract and was coming off a gold-medal experience in Los Angeles. He was more interested in getting some sleep than talking some swoosh.

He had met with Nike officials at a Beverly Hills hotel during the Games. Former Nike marketing representative Sonny Vaccaro introduced a groundbreaking idea: a signature shoe for Jordan. It was certainly enticing, but Jordan wore Converse at North Carolina and Adidas everywhere else. As agent David Falk said in a September interview on “Chicago Tribune Live,” Jordan preferred to sign with Adidas.

Jordan’s interest in Nike was lukewarm, and he urged his parents to go to Oregon without him.

“Michael didn’t even want to be here, but his mother and father put a stop to that,” said Howard White, the vice president of marketing for Jordan Brand, who was at the original meeting. “They said, ‘We are going to Oregon.’ So Michael was

in Oregon. And I’m still not sure he cared. He didn’t like Nikes.”

Nike liked Mike enough to develop a prototype shoe. He liked the idea of having an entire ad campaign built around his own shoe and that Nike was interested in him for more than his obvious basketball talents.

“I think it was the total package,” Knight said.

“The great smile and looks. ... If you were in the business, you would have been insane not to want him because he had a great flair to his game.”

Converse already had struck deals with Larry Bird and Magic Johnson for its Weapon line and didn’t need Jordan, certainly not as badly as Nike did. That Nike was a corporate underdog with maverick tendencies appealed to Jordan’s competitiveness.

“While we had a lot of really good players, he was going to be the one who really personified the brand,” Knight said. “By the time Michael came out, we had decided he was the one. Two years before that, I don’t know if you would have said that, but when he said he was coming out [after his junior year] and as soon as he signed [an NBA] contract, we knew it was going to be him.”

Before long, the way corporations dealt with athletes was changed forever. A monster of sports and commerce had been created, and he wore a No. 23 Bulls jersey.

“That was the first time anyone said here was an individual we’ll pay to represent a company through their own signature product,” White said. “There was no signature product prior to Michael Jordan.”

Jordan signed the 22-page deal with Nike on Oct. 14, 1984. It is on display inside the building on Nike’s campus bearing his name.

The original Air Jordan, designed by Peter Moore, violated the NBA’s uniform code. Its black, red and white scheme threatened to cost Jordan some green — \$5,000 each game he wore them. Nike, which always has embraced an anti-establishment persona under Knight, happily paid the fines and even built an ad campaign around the idea that Air Jordans were so good, the NBA deemed them illegal.

“Most kids want what they can’t have, so it was great,” White said. “There were a lot of things that had to come together to start off right.”

By 1987, a successful product launch had turned into a pop-culture phenomenon.

For Air Jordan III, Nike hired filmmaker and basketball fanatic Spike Lee to make a commercial with Jordan, marking the beginning of an unexpected but undeniable bond linking Lee — a devoted Knicks fan — with Jordan — the Knicks’ nemesis.

Shooting in black and white, Lee reprised his alter ego Mars Blackmon from the film “She’s Gotta Have It.” As he famously told Jordan, “It’s gotta be the shoes.” Jim Riswold, the copywriter responsible for the “Bo Knows” phrase, came up with the line that stuck in the heads of youths all over America.

The revolutionary commercial was matched by the shoe itself. The Air Jordan III was the first of its kind to include an air window in the sole, a tab in the back and — at Jordan’s request — a mid-cut that split the difference between a high- and low-top.

“He didn’t think he needed the high-top but was nervous about going with the low-top, so we created this,” Hatfield said.

It struck a chord with Jordan that Hatfield patterned the shoe after a black panther, with black leather over a pawlike

The critics

Nike, Jordan endure share of controversy

The match made in sports marketing heaven has been a marriage like any other, for better or for worse.

Most prominent among the rough spots were the reports that Nike used sweatshops in Indonesia. In 1996, human-rights and labor advocates demanded that Nike improve pay and conditions for its workers.

Nike said it subcontracted its work and had no control over how the workers were treated, although it said it had tried to improve conditions.

But Michael Jordan only fueled the fire with a response that infuriated his critics.

During the 1996 NBA Finals, when asked about the alleged abuse of child workers, Jordan said: “I think that’s Nike’s decision to do what they can to make sure everything is correctly done. I don’t know the complete situation. Why should I? I’m trying to do my job.”

No matter how many press releases Nike churned out to document the millions invested in continuing education and low-interest loans in those underprivileged countries, Jordan, as Nike’s biggest attraction, remained the focal point of criticism.

Likewise, many consider Jordan’s iconic Jumpman as a symbol for greed in sports. Jordan’s Hall of Fame exhibit already has been panned for having too much Nike, not enough Mike.

To those most critical of Jordan, every shoe sold under his name takes him one step further from his social responsibility.

Howard White, vice president of marketing for Jordan Brand, and those close to Jordan have heard the charge often — and scoff every time.

“You always hear Michael doesn’t give back to the community,” White said with a sigh. “But to me he makes some of the boldest social statements in the world: show up for work, be on time and be accountable for your job.”

Jordan’s success also created unexpected consequences.

The unprecedented annual demand for each new design of the Air Jordan sneakers elevated the shoes to such status symbols in many American cities that youths were using any means to get a pair, including violence. Fame had never felt so conflicting to Jordan than when he considered kids were literally dying to wear his shoes.

“People started robbing each other for the shoes, and it bothered him,” said Tinker Hatfield, Nike’s vice president of innovation and the primary designer for the Air Jordan line. “We were all sad, but it was much more a comment on materialism and people not respecting life. There was something else in our society driving that behavior so we never felt guilty or responsible or thought we would dial back and do less cool stuff, and Michael was adamant about that.”

— *David Haugh*

sole. Hatfield recalls Jordan getting a tear in his eye because kids called him “black cat” growing up.

This was a critical time in Jordan’s relationship with Nike. Rumors abounded that he was ready to leave the company. But the Air Jordan III was the first to feature the Jumpman logo. Jordan had direct input on the specifications and from that point on, his involvement in the creation of every shoe increased.

So Jordan kept pushing and Hatfield kept designing, drawing inspiration from myriad places. For the Jordan V, a bomber from a John Wayne movie. The Jordan XII, a pair of Gucci shoes. The Jordan XIV, loosely based on a Ferrari.

The ah-ha moment for Hatfield’s favorite shoe, the Jordan XI, developed after he looked at a lawnmower.

“It was glossy, shiny and had a different top from bottom, and for years, Michael had talked to me about doing a shiny basketball shoe,” Hatfield said.

The stylish black-and-white combination pleased Jordan so much he predicted kids would begin wearing the XI with tuxedos. When Boyz II Men showed up in formalwear and the shoes for the 1995 American Music Awards, Hatfield’s phone rang.

“MJ called me up and said, ‘Told ya.’”

For Hatfield, one meeting with baseball star Alex Rodriguez best reflects the impact Air Jordans have made in the last 25 years.

Nike officials had flown to Miami in 1994 to woo Rodriguez, then a naïve teen sensation ready to burst into Major League Baseball with the Seattle Mariners.

As negotiations over a multimillion-dollar deal were ongoing, A-Rod asked to be heard: If he agreed to Nike’s offer, could he could get a pair of Air Jordan VIIIs, circa 1992?

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It's gotta be the shoes

A panel of experts breaks down 24 years of Air Jordans

Michael Jordan's Air Jordan shoes created a splash as soon as they entered the league in 1985, colored bright red, while other players traditionally wore white. For 23 more years, the designers at Nike made sneakers inspired by everything from airplanes to snakes. The brand caught the popular imagination with a run of commercials starring

the likes of Spike Lee, Bugs Bunny, Derek Jeter and Mos Def. The brand's success stands strong today as the No. 2 basketball shoe in 2007, 2008 and through July 2009 in terms of dollars spent. Below is each version with release date, original retail price and comments from a panel of Air Jordan experts.

The experts: Anthony Gilbert, of the sports marketing firm AXG, Jeremy Ripley of Bounce magazine and Bradley Carbone of Complex magazine

<div>AIR JORDAN I</div> <div></div> <div>Release date — MARCH 1985 Original price — \$65</div> <div>Nike paid the \$5,000-a-game fine for Jordan for wearing the red, black and white sneakers. "No one saw this coming with that shoe," Gilbert said.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN II</div> <div></div> <div>NOVEMBER 1986 \$100</div> <div>The shoe carried a "Made in Italy" tag and was constructed of "premium" Italian leather. "They were like a pair of dress shoes," Gilbert said.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN III</div> <div></div> <div>FEBRUARY 1988 \$100</div> <div>The debut of the Jumpman logo: "You can shine it on the sky and it's synonymous with greatness," Gilbert said. It also featured an elephant skin pattern.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN IV</div> <div></div> <div>FEBRUARY 1989 \$100</div> <div>Featured in Spike Lee's "Do the Right Thing," when a scuffed-up sneaker leads to a racial scuffle. "It's such a cool-looking sneaker," Carbone said.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN V</div> <div></div> <div>FEBRUARY 1990 \$125</div> <div>Inspired by a WWII Mustang fighter, with with flames on the side and a reflective tongue. "The details are really something," Carbone said.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN VI</div> <div></div> <div>FEBRUARY 1991 \$125</div> <div>The No. 23 is cleverly incorporated into material on the upper part of the shoe. The shoes Jordan wore for his first Bulls championship.</div>
<div>AIR JORDAN VII</div> <div></div> <div>FEBRUARY 1992 \$125</div> <div>Versions of the shoe were made in Team USA uniform colors coinciding with the Barcelona Olympic games, featuring Jordan's Olympics jersey number, 9.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN VIII</div> <div></div> <div>NOVEMBER 1992 \$140</div> <div>The world met Hare Jordan, played by Bugs Bunny in its ad campaign. Came in three color combos including a black and aqua pair Jordan wore for the All-Star Game.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN IX</div> <div></div> <div>NOVEMBER 1993 \$125</div> <div>MJ did not wear this shoe on the court because he had retired and Nike transformed it into a baseball cleat. Designed with various symbols and languages.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN X</div> <div></div> <div>NOVEMBER 1994 \$125</div> <div>In Jordan's first comeback, some of his accomplishments were written on the sole. The shoe was issued in different colors representing different U.S. cities.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN XI</div> <div></div> <div>NOVEMBER 1995 \$125</div> <div>Featured a patent leather toe for what Nike called a formal look. "Everybody's favorite Jordan, from the average person to LeBron," Gilbert said.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN XII</div> <div></div> <div>NOVEMBER 1996 \$140</div> <div>The design features a "Rising Sun" motif mimicking Japan's flag, but no Nike logo or lettering. "He didn't need backing from the Swoosh to survive," Ripley said.</div>
<div>AIR JORDAN XIII</div> <div></div> <div>NOVEMBER 1997 \$150</div> <div>Inspired by a black panther with a green hologram "eye" on the heel. The bottom was a paw print. "It made everyone stop and stare," Gilbert said.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN XIV</div> <div></div> <div>OCTOBER 1998 \$150</div> <div>Inspired by Jordan's Ferrari 550M with the logo on the side in a yellow shield. The shoe's street name is "Last shots" after Jordan's NBA Finals' heroics.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN XV</div> <div></div> <div>DECEMBER 1999 \$150</div> <div>The other shoe Jordan never played in. Modeled after a X-15 fighter jet. A conspicuous tongue is rumored to have been influenced by Jordan's own.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN XVI</div> <div></div> <div>FEBRUARY 2001 \$160</div> <div>The shoe came with spats that made the shoe transform from court to office, as Jordan's career did. Ad campaign featured Mos Def.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN XVII</div> <div></div> <div>FEBRUARY 2002 \$200</div> <div>A pair came in a metal case that along with a multimedia CD-ROM. The design was based on jazz and featured the notes from a song about Jordan.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN XVIII</div> <div></div> <div>FEBRUARY 2003 \$175</div> <div>Design was inspired by Italian race cars and came in Wizards' colors. Shoes came with a brush and cloth to clean the suede.</div>
<div>AIR JORDAN XIX</div> <div></div> <div>FEBRUARY 2004 \$165</div> <div>A black mamba snake slithered into design elements. The upper part of the shoe is made of a braided material often used for tubing and covering in car engines.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN XX</div> <div></div> <div>FEBRUARY 2005 \$175</div> <div>Partly inspired by low-cut motorcycle shoes as Jordan got into bike racing in 2004. The shoe lists some of Jordan's accomplishments on each heel.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN XX1</div> <div></div> <div>FEBRUARY 2006 \$175</div> <div>Modeled after a Bentley with a grille design on the side of the shoe. The shoe also came with removable parts that could make the cushioning firm or soft.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN XX2</div> <div></div> <div>FEBRUARY 2007 \$175</div> <div>Inspired by the F-22 fighter jet with a camouflage heel cover and zig-zag "radar." The shoe also had changeable cushioning for different surfaces.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN XX3</div> <div></div> <div>FEBRUARY 2008 \$185</div> <div>An eco-friendly Air Jordan, with materials meant to reduce waste. The look had a quilted upper portion like "owning something hand-crafted," Gilbert said.</div>	<div>AIR JORDAN 2009</div> <div></div> <div>FEBRUARY 2009 \$190</div> <div>Inspired by prosthetic running technology with satin pleating and polishable leather. Also, the Roman numeral naming system was changed.</div>

SOURCE: Nike, the NPD Group

JONATHAN BERLIN / TRIBUNE

Beaverton

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"When we said of course, Alex got emotional," Hatfield recalled. "It seems when he was young, he wanted those shoes, but his mom couldn't afford them. That's how much those shoes meant to him ... and so many others."

Steve Prefontaine was the first athlete to endorse the internationally recognized Nike swoosh when Blue Ribbon Sports adopted a new name and logo in 1972. A native of Coos Bay, Ore., and a graduate of the University of Oregon like Knight, Prefontaine used to send Nike running shoes to runners along with notes of encouragement. The free-spirited runner never lost a race on his home course in college and finished fourth in the 5,000-

meter run in the 1972 Munich Olympics. He was killed in a car accident in 1975 at 24. Knight has eulogized Pre as "the soul" of Nike. Michael Jordan is the heart. "I don't think Michael Jordan could be this if he was just a basketball player," White said. "Basketball players come, go. You've got LeBron [James]. You've got Kobe [Bryant]. But Michael Jordan resonated larger than basketball." Spend a few days walking around Nike's pristine 193-acre campus, with its 17 buildings named after athletes, and there is no doubting that the love for and devotion to Jordan exceeds that of any other athlete — besides Prefontaine. The line to get into the auditorium to hear Jordan speak during the "23 Celebrates 25" tribute June 16 stretched for at

least a quarter mile. Those among the 5,500 employees who couldn't get in were allowed to watch the ceremony on closed-circuit TV. Jeff Jordan, Michael's oldest son and former Illinois basketball player, started his summer job that day. He got a pretty good seat for an intern. Jordan visits for Nike's quarterly meetings, when he likes to rib officials about why his Jordan Brand staff works in the Jerry Rice Building. "I always felt this all was bigger than a shoe," White said. "So one day, I think after Michael's first retirement, I said to Phil, 'Man, why can't we make this a brand?' Phil said, 'The guy isn't playing anymore. Why do you think we can make this a brand?'" White paused and took a deep breath for effect.

"I said, 'Because I just happened to be walking down the street in front of campus the other day, and a Mercedes-Benz came by,'" White continued. "And Phil said, 'What does that have to do with anything?' And I said, 'Because I think Mr. Mercedes is dead and they're still making Mercedes-Benz.'" "He said, 'Point well taken.'" Jordan has played for two NBA teams but has represented only one shoe company. And of the Phils central to Jordan's life, Knight has given him direction longer than Jackson. "It's just been such an incredible journey that neither one of us could have envisioned," Knight said. "You go through all the ups and downs, the trials and the struggles. ... It's been a fabulous ride."

Chicago



Jordan rejoices after hitting The Shot over Cleveland's Craig Ehlo (left) in a first-round clincher in the 1989 NBA playoffs. TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

As the Chicago Bulls' triumphs crescendo, their effects stretch well beyond basketball

On Nov. 7, 1987, Michael Jordan scored 36 points at the old Chicago Stadium as the Bulls defeated Philadelphia to begin their 1987-88 season.

Four days earlier, in a Danville, Ill., hospital room, Jordan Keith Dalton began his life.

"I wanted him to be like me," said his father, Keith Dalton, a former basketball star at Champaign Centennial. "But I wanted him to be like Mike too."

Go take the measure of the man.
Capturing Jordan's lasting legacy today, following and admiring the myriad ripples affected by his excellence, you can find yourself almost anywhere, from Brooklyn to Oregon, from sea to shining sea.

Closer to home, we'll begin with Jordan Keith Dalton, 21, a 5-foot-8-inch point guard for Augustana College in Sioux Falls, S.D.

The first four-year varsity player in Warren Township High School history, Dalton has overcome questions about his height with heart and earned a scholarship to play NCAA Division II basketball. A fixture on Augustana's dean's list with a 3.3 grade-point average, he is set to graduate in May in accounting and sports management. "I'm not going to make a living playing basketball; let's be realistic about that," Dalton said. "But I am about to get a \$120,000 education for free because of basketball. ... It'd be kind of foolish of me not to take advantage of the opportunity I've been given."

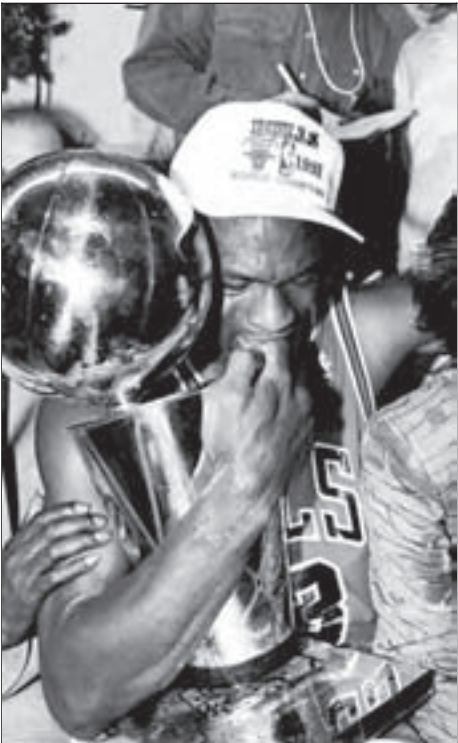
Dalton said this while seated next to Ceola Clark, a former high school teammate who earned his own basketball scholarship to Division I Western Illinois.

In one of those serendipitous slices of life, Clark, who estimates he has owned "150 to 200" pairs of Air Jordan shoes in his 20 years, played AAU basketball with Jeff Jordan, Michael's oldest son.

His trips to Michael Jordan's house were frequent.

"I've been around Michael so much now that I see him just as Jeff's dad most of the time," Clark said. "But sometimes when I'm talking to him, I still stop and have a moment where I'm amazed. 'Oh my God. This is Michael Jordan, the greatest player to ever play basketball.'"

Go take the measure of the man.



An emotional release after the Bulls beat the Lakers in the NBA Finals in 1991, Jordan's first championship. AP PHOTO

It's no easy task in this city, which lived and breathed all six championships and can distill most of Michael's moments down to shorthand—The Shot, The 63-point Game, The Double Nickel, The Flu Game, The Pose.

You go to strange places, wonderful places. It takes you from the elbows of some of the biggest names in basketball to hallways of youth centers to ticket scalpers' living rooms.

And seemingly everywhere you go, the name—Michael Jordan—elicits a smile.

Scottie Pippen is in a downtown restaurant doing just that. His broad grin flashes as he ponders the question of his favorite Michael memory.

"I might not be able to repeat that one," said Pippen, laughing.

Along with coach Phil Jackson, Pippen will be linked to Jordan for eternity, the so-called perfect sidekick to Jordan's dominance.

"We both wanted to win," Pippen said. "We had the mind-set to do whatever it took to win. It wasn't really about any individual accomplishment. Whatever happened for us as individuals just kind of happened and evolved with how we played the game."

"My kids now know who Michael Jordan is. ... The opportunity to look back at our legacy, knowing I played with one of the greatest players ever and that we were able to share the same court for numerous years means a lot to me."

"Everything we accomplished, we pretty much did together."

Pippen and Jordan played 11 seasons in Chicago. During their run, which included six NBA titles, Pippen witnessed Jordan perform countless gravity-defying dunks and sink clutch game-winning jumpers.

Yet his favorite memory came after failure.

"We came in and lost that first game [of the 1991 NBA Finals] against the Lakers," Pippen said. "His leadership was very positive and strong for a young team that was very fragile after dealing with the Pistons. His greatness and confidence level really propelled us to win the next four games."

Asked what Jordan's legacy is today, Pippen smiled.

"You been in Foot Locker?" he said. "He has a huge impact on the game and youth in basketball. He's very well-branded, shoes everywhere. It's an opportunity for kids to watch his style and charisma."

Pippen wasn't joking. He was in town to help film a Gatorade commercial honoring Jordan's Hall of Fame induction. The sports energy drink company created one of the more enduring jingles in sports marketing with its "Be Like Mike" campaign.

They're still trying.

The scene surrounding the commercial shoot is surreal. Fans of all ages and races stand two- to three-deep around a fenced-in basketball court on the West Side. Most

Please turn to **Next Page**

Feb. 7, 1988: In his fourth All-Star Game, he earns his first MVP honors, scoring 40 points in the East victory.

May 8, 1988: With Jordan scoring 39 points, the Bulls beat the Cavs 107-101 to claim a first-round series victory. It marks the first time Jordan advances to the conference semifinals.

May 18, 1988: Jordan scores 25 points, but the Bulls' season ends with a 102-95 loss in Game 5 to the Detroit Pistons, who take the series 4-1 and become a roadblock for Jordan over the next few years.

May 1988: After averaging 35 points, 5.5 rebounds, 5.9 assists and 3.2 steals per game, Jordan becomes the first player to be named league MVP and defensive player of the year in the same season.

1988-89

Jan. 25, 1989: With 33 points in a 120-108 loss to the 76ers, Jordan surpasses 10,000 career points. He'll go on to win his third straight scoring title, averaging 32.5 points per game.

May 7, 1989: Jordan nails what becomes known as The Shot for a 101-100 victory over Cleveland in the playoffs, a bucket that has since haunted Cavs fans. The hanging foul-line jumper over Craig Ehlo at the buzzer in Game 5 clinches the first-round series for the Bulls.

May 19, 1989: With a 113-111 Game 6 victory against the Knicks, Jordan scores 40 points and advances to the conference finals for the first time in his five-year career.

June 2, 1989: The Bulls lose grasp of their 2-1 series lead and fall 4-2 to the Pistons in the finals.

1989-90

July 11, 1989: Phil Jackson is elevated from assistant to head coach of the Bulls to replace Doug Collins. Jordan thrives under Jackson's system.

Sept. 2, 1989: At 3:30 a.m. in the Little White Chapel in Las Vegas, Jordan marries Juanita Vanoy in front of four guests.

March 28, 1990: Jordan scores a career-high 69 points against the Cavs in a 117-113 victory. He hits 23 of 37 field goals, goes 21-for-23 on free throws and grabs 18 rebounds.

June 3, 1990: The Bulls fall to the Pistons in the playoffs for a third straight season. The Pistons, who double- and triple-team Jordan, eliminate the Bulls in Game 7 in Detroit 93-74.

1990-91

April 21, 1991: Jordan scores 18 points in the regular-season finish against the Pistons, having led the Bulls to a 61-21 season and earning another scoring title by averaging 31.5 points per game.

May 1991: Jordan is named league MVP for the second time.

May 27, 1991: Jordan scores 29 points in a deciding Game 4 victory against the Pistons, a sweep of the team that had given the Bulls so much trouble in previous playoffs.

June 12, 1991: In winning his first championship, Jordan scores 30 points with 10 assists and five steals as the Bulls defeat the Lakers 108-101 in Game 5 of the NBA Finals. Jordan cries during the locker-room celebration and receives the first of six Finals MVP awards.

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Larry Bird (from left), Scottie Pippen, Michael Jordan and Clyde Drexler celebrate their gold medals at the Barcelona Olympics. REUTERS FILE PHOTO

Barcelona

Star-studded Dream Team dominates '92 Olympics, taking basketball global

The once ubiquitous “Jordan 23” Bulls jersey is rarely seen on Spanish youngsters these days — they’re more likely to favor the distinctive blue-and-garnet “10” shirt worn by FC Barcelona idol Lionel Messi. *Futbol* still reigns in this part of the world.

The Nike-conceived, wall-sized mural of Michael Jordan in spectacular flight that once loomed over a busy downtown plaza is long gone, replaced by a glitzy ad for the latest in Euro-hip menswear.

But if Jordan is no longer a visible presence in this corner of the basketball world, he’s still a tangible one.

By Dan McGrath

Seventeen years ago, NBA basketball came to the Olympics, to the spectacular Barcelona Games, with the ballyhooed presence of the Jordan-led “Dream Team” This fulfilled the International Basketball Federation president’s goal of making FIBA’s world tournaments truly world-class by involving the world’s best players.

International basketball was instantly and radically transformed.

“If the game has exploded globally, Barcelona was the atomic bomb,” said Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski, a Dream Team assistant and head coach of the gold-medal-winning 2008 U.S. team.

Jordan, meanwhile, evolved from an NBA mega-star to an athlete of world renown, one with unprecedented marketing muscle.

“He was known for the thing that fascinates all of us — flight,” said Walt Szczerbiak, a longtime Spanish League standout, talent consultant and father of NBA veteran Wally Szczerbiak.

“A few years earlier, Michael had come to Spain on a marketing tour for Nike, and the publicity was unbelievable. Barcelona and the buzz it generated was like an extension of that. His legend just kept growing.”

As did his influence, via the Dream Team.

Among the handful of foreign-born players on NBA rosters pre-Barcelona, only Drazen Petrovic of the Nets and Sarunas Marciulonis of the Warriors were rotation-worthy contributors.

Fast-forward to the 2008-09 season. Nearly 20 percent of NBA players were foreign-born, including All-Stars Dirk Nowitzki, Manu Ginobli, Tony Parker and Pau Gasol.

“The ‘92 Olympics was a coming-out party for our sport,” NBA Commissioner David Stern said, citing, among other things, television-distribution figures. “Pre-Barcelona [the NBA was broadcast in] 80-odd countries. Now it’s 213,” Stern said. “That growth started with the number of people who got to watch Michael Jordan and the Dream Team.”

Krzyzewski has seen it first-hand. The three-time NCAA title-winning coach joined Lenny Wilkens

and P.J. Carlesimo as assistants to the late Chuck Daly on the Dream Team staff. Long a leader within USA Basketball, Krzyzewski coached the 2008 U.S. squad — known as the Redeem Team following its disappointing play in Athens — to a gold medal in Beijing and has agreed to stay on for the London campaign in 2012.

“Barcelona was the impetus for how far the rest of the world has come,” Krzyzewski said. “I’ve been told about Manu Ginobili as a kid watching in Argentina, a young Pau Gasol watching in Spain. ... ‘Wow, the Dream Team. That’s how basketball is supposed to be played.’

“Now we have to send our best players and have them organized and playing as a team if we’re going to be competitive.”

The Dream Team, as expected, waltzed to Barcelona gold with eight straight wins.

Since then, six countries besides the U.S. have won Olympic basketball medals, most notably Argentina’s gold at Athens in 2004, which prompted a stronger commitment from the USA Basketball-NBA partnership.

“China is an interesting example of the game’s development,” Stern said. “They were barely a presence in Barcelona [winless in seven games]. Now they have one of the largest and strongest programs in the world. A friend of mine over there told me the government embraced basketball because it promotes fitness, discipline and harmony.”

With professional and club leagues operating throughout the world, nine countries have won medals in the FIBA World Championships since 1994, including four different gold medalists. And the U.S. hardly dominates at age-group developmental levels.

“There’s no question the Dream Team and Michael Jordan were the catalyst for basketball truly going global — they were the gold standard,” said Evanston-born Dan Peterson, a former U.S. college coach, longtime European coach and now a basketball TV commentator in Italy.

“You can’t discount the awe factor. In Barcelona, a lot of those teams were beaten before they started. I thought it might take a couple of Olympics for the awe to wear off and the other teams to become more competitive.”

The move to include NBA players in the Olympics began in the ‘80s, when Borislav “Bora” Stankovic, longtime FIBA president and one of the most respected figures in international sport, began pushing for it. Though the concept of amateurism had gradually vanished from the most prominent Olympic sports, Stankovic’s goal was to grow the game he had played and coached with

Olympics

YEAR	GAMES	FG%	PER GAME AVERAGES		
			POINTS	REBS.	ASST.
1984	8	54.5	17.1	3.0	2.0
1992	8	45.1	14.9	2.4	4.8
Totals	16	49.8	16.0	2.7	3.4

great passion in his native Yugoslavia for most of his life.

“I’m a hobby tennis player, and I’ve always felt that if I’m going to get better I have to play against better competition,” Stankovic, now 84, said from his vacation home in the Greek islands.

“That’s also true of basketball. If we were going to make it a stronger, better game around the world, you had to have the best players, and the best players were from the NBA.

“We couldn’t call our tournaments world-class if we didn’t involve the best players.”

Before Barcelona, U.S. teams consisting mainly of college players had won nine of 12 gold medals since basketball was added to the Olympic menu in 1936. The U.S. boycotted the 1980 Moscow Games in protest of the Soviet Union’s military involvement in Afghanistan and lost medal-round games to Soviet teams in 1972 and 1988.

The ‘72 debacle, occurring amid all-too-real atrocities in Munich, was written off as an aberration, the result of inconceivably inept, if not corrupt, officiating.

No such excuses were available in 1988. A seasoned, versatile Soviet squad featuring Lithuanians Marciulonis and future NBA pro Arvydas Sabonis simply man-handled coach John Thompson’s collegians, prompting speculation that USA Basketball was turning to the NBA out of pique over being beaten at its own game.

Not so, according to Russ Granik, point man for the NBA’s ‘92 Olympic effort as deputy commissioner.

“We just found ourselves invited to the dance — FIBA approached us,” Granik said. “Amateurism was pretty much a thing of the past in most Olympic sports, and we had heard from Dave Gavitt and C.M. Newton and the USA Basketball people that a resolution to open basketball to NBA players was likely to pass. We figured, ‘If this gets approved, we have to do it,’ and we were committed to doing it right.”

Rod Thorn, who had drafted Jordan as Bulls general manager in 1984 and was then working in the league office, took the lead in assembling the team.

Jordan, perennial scoring champ and three-time MVP, was the NBA’s dominant player and top attraction, but he wouldn’t tip his hand regarding his Olympic intentions. The Bulls were coming off a second straight into-the-summer title run, which cut into his golf time, and he already

owned a gold medal as the leading scorer on Bob Knight’s 1984 team that won in Los Angeles.

“Michael was pretty coy with the media, but he assured us he was coming,” Granik said.

Nike, which had become an Olympic colossus since its humble start manufacturing track shoes, wanted its most prominent representative there, obviously.

FIBA’s Stankovic had no worries.

“I’m very good friends with Dean Smith,” he said of Jordan’s college coach, whom MJ respects like few others in his life. “Dean told me he’d talk to Michael about coming, that it was very important. And when Dean Smith asks ...”

Chris Mullin and Patrick Ewing were among Jordan’s Olympic teammates in ‘84. Charles Barkley and John Stockton had been cut from that squad and welcomed another chance. David Robinson was looking to avenge 1988. Aging icons Larry Bird and Magic Johnson were eager to add an Olympic experience to their distinguished resumes, as were NBA All-Stars Karl Malone, Clyde Drexler and Scottie Pippen.

College player of the year Christian Laettner of Duke completed the 12-man roster, likely the best ever assembled, its depth alone making it superior to 1960 (Oscar Robertson, Jerry West, Jerry Lucas) and 2008 (Kobe Bryant, LeBron James, Dwyane Wade).

How good was the Dream Team? It featured 10 of the 50 players — all but Mullin and Laettner — on an all-time NBA list chosen in conjunction with the league’s 50-year anniversary in 1996.

“You tell yourself you’re not going to be intimidated, that it’s just basketball, but from the time they took the floor, everybody understood that they were serious and too good to be challenged,” said Marciulonis, who helped Lithuania to a bronze medal, highlighted by an emotional win over their Russian rivals in the third-place game.

“Michael, Patrick, Larry ... They were not just great players, they had such a feel for each other. We all thought, ‘This is what basketball should look like.’”

Granik had a “holy cow” sense of it even before Barcelona.

“We had to qualify because we hadn’t won the gold medal in ‘88, so we bought the rights to the Tournament of the Americas and moved it to Portland,” he recalled. “I’m watching these guys warm up before our first game, all this talent on the same team, and I thought, ‘Boy, this is really incredible.’”

He also got a sense of what the team’s Olympic reception would be like.

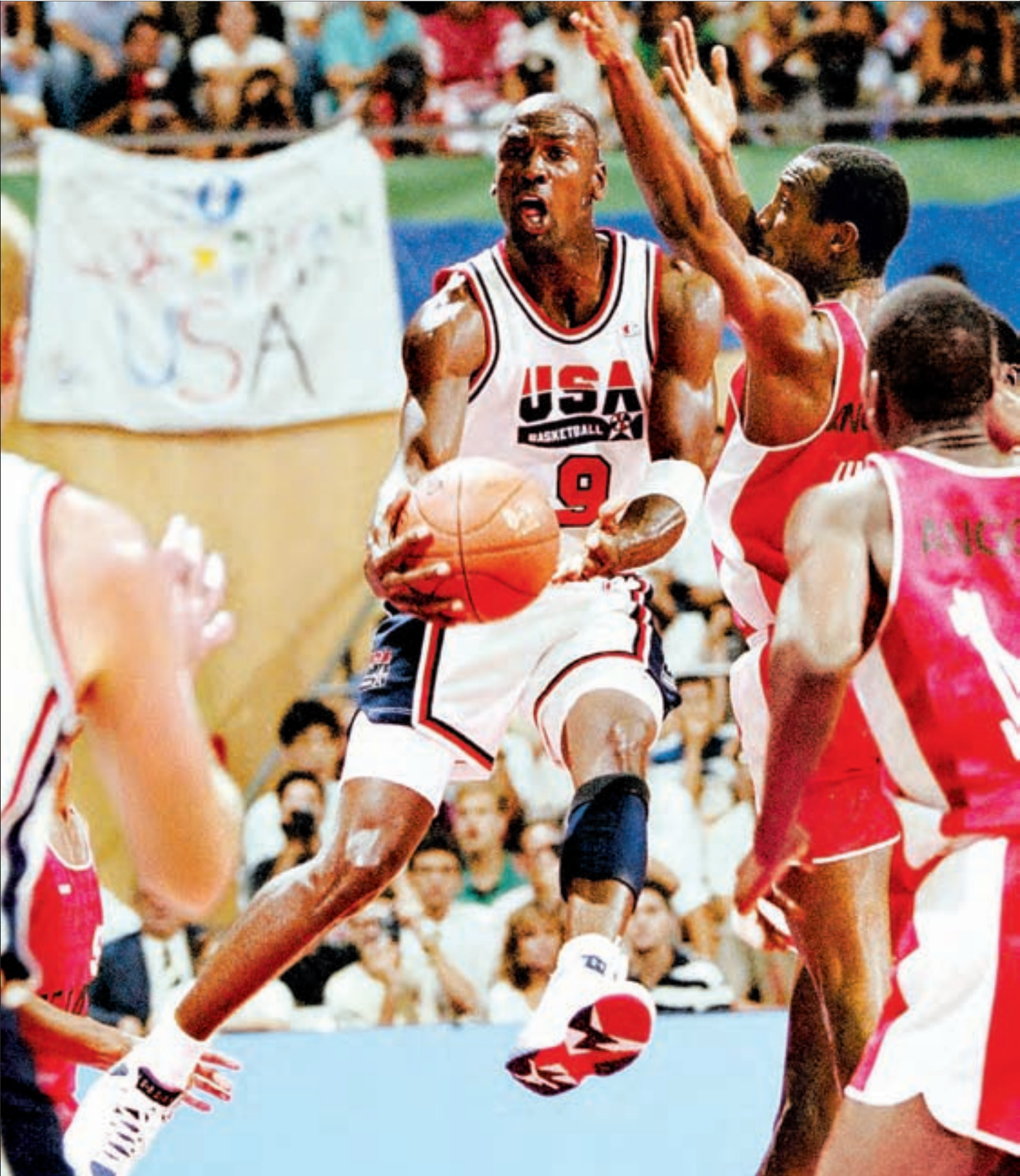
“We heard some grumbling that it’s not fair to the rest of the world,” Granik said. “Not fair? Those guys wanted us there. Some of our early games were delayed because the other teams wanted to pose for pictures and get our guys’ autographs before the tip. We had to build in time to allow for those exchanges.”

Brian McIntyre, then the NBA’s media relations director, now vice president of its communications group, recalls one bump on the road to Barcelona.

“They wanted some outside competition while we were training in La Jolla, so they brought in a ‘select team’ — Bobby Hurley

Barcelona

“Michael, Patrick, Larry ... They were not just great players, they had such a feel for each other. We all thought, ‘This is what basketball should look like.’ ”



Jordan drives to the hoop against Angola. “The practices were a lot harder than the games,” Lenny Wilkens said. ALLSPORT FILE PHOTO

Continued from Previous Page

and a bunch of college guys. The first time we scrimmaged, they beat us. We couldn’t make a shot, they played great ... they beat us. Chuck [Daly] was really pissed. ‘Get that [expletive] score off the scoreboard and not a word of this to anybody.’

“Well, of course word got out, and now there’s speculation whether this Dream Team idea can work — too many egos? Now everybody’s pissed.

“The next day we scrimmaged them again and it’s 12-0 before the first timeout, 22-1 before the second ... we just destroyed them.”

Daly was jokingly referred to as the “Prince of Pessimism,” but he knew what he had as the team left for Barcelona, confiding one goal to assistant Wilkens: not to call a timeout during the tournament. And he didn’t, over eight games in which the U.S. never scored fewer than 103 points or allowed more than 85, winning by an average margin of 43.8 points. A 117-85 thumping of Petrovic, Toni Kukoc and Croatia in the gold-medal game was its closest.

“That’s how dominant we were — the best in the world,” Wilkens said.

“I can say this now—the practices were a lot harder than the games. These guys were not only great players but great competitors, competitive about everything, and the way they went after each other in practice was incredible.

“One time we hadn’t played for about three days and Chuck was worried that we might be stale, so I said to Magic, ‘Let’s kick it up a little in practice today.’ About 10 minutes into it, Chuck said, ‘We’d better dial it down some. We don’t want anybody getting hurt.’ ”

For all its talent, the team was remarkably cohesive and unselfish.

“Absolutely. We told them what was expected of them and they all bought in,” Wilkens said.

“Why wouldn’t they?” Granik said. “This was a chance for Magic to play with Larry, Patrick Ewing with Michael. ... The only other time they’d get that chance was in an All-Star Game, and this was a little more serious than that.”

Though he averaged a modest 14.9 points to Barkley’s team-leading 18, Jordan was first among equals.

“At the time I thought Magic might be the most recognizable guy because of ‘Showtime,’ the five titles and the HIV thing he’d gone through,” Granik said. “But once we got over there it was obvious Michael was the guy everybody wanted to see.”

Peterson had never seen Jordan play in person.

“I never thought I’d replace Oscar Robertson or Jerry West on my all-time team, but I had to once I saw Michael up close,” he said. “Not just the ability, but the competitiveness and the smarts. It’s like he’s seen the movie before.

“I call it athletic genius. All the great ones have it, and he had more of it than anybody.”



U.S. coach Chuck Daly confers with his team during a preliminary game against Croatia. AP FILE PHOTO

Wilkens had seen plenty of Jordan — he was coaching the Cleveland Cavaliers when Jordan made “The Shot” over Craig Ehlo in the 1989 playoffs.

“Michael was unbelievable,” Wilkens said. “I always enjoyed watching him, even competing against him, but seeing him in that setting gave me a new appreciation. He was the greatest player in the world, of course, but he was gracious to everybody, an unselfish teammate. ... He really took on the role of basketball ambassador.”

McIntyre caught one glimpse of Jordan’s insatiable competitiveness.

“I’d been through two NBA Finals with Michael and I knew him pretty well, and we were talking in the hotel one night and he told me he was going to blend in and be a teammate and not try to dominate. So I traded him from my fantasy team — I got [Brazilian gunner] Oscar Schmidt and a couple of other guys who figured to score a lot of points.

“Next time I saw Michael I told him that — I traded him from my fantasy team. He got this look — ‘You *what*?’ That night he went out and dropped 26 on Angola or somebody in about 20 minutes. I said, ‘I thought you weren’t going to dominate.’ He said, ‘Don’t believe everything I tell you.’ ”

Bob Ryan covered every stop of the Dream Team Tour for the Boston Globe.

“I wouldn’t say Michael was dominant,” he said, “but every so often he’d turn it on just to remind people he was Michael Jordan.”

And those people ate it up.

“We could have used a bigger venue,” Stankovic said. “[Palau de Badalona] held about 15,000, as I recall. We needed that many seats for the VIP section. Everyone wanted to see Michael.”

Everyone from the U.S. side who witnessed the Dream Team’s reception of-

ferred a similar analogy: It was like touring with rock stars.

“I never traveled with the Beatles, obviously, but I have to believe this is what that was like,” Granik said.

Stern went him one better: “Like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.”

As did McIntyre: “Like the Beatles and Elvis.”

Seventeen years later, there’s little evidence of Jordan or his fellow Dream Teamers in Barcelona outside the Olympic Museum on Montjuic, the hilly parkland overlooking the city where most of the venues were located and remain in use today. In a trendy Nike store along La Rambla, the quirky, bustling commercial strip that links Barcelona’s waterfront with its stylish shopping districts, one deep-corner display of Jordan-brand apparel is the only basketball offering.

And yet ...

The Barcelona Olympics began in spectacular fashion, with Spanish archer Antonio Rebollo igniting the caldron by shooting a flaming arrow over it from the stadium floor hundreds of yards away.

It featured the return of South Africa and Cuba and a unified German team. It ended with one of the great track meets in history. But it’s remembered best for basketball.

“In the past the Olympics were known for track and field, swimming, gymnastics and even boxing,” Stern said. “Since ’92, basketball has probably been the toughest ticket.”

“I was very gratified with how it worked out — it was truly great for basketball,” Stankovic said. “They were not just great players but true sportsmen who promoted great fellowship among all the teams. I got to know Michael and I like him very, very much.

“It was a thrill to watch him play.”

1991-92

June 3, 1992: Jordan torches the Trail Blazers in Game 1 of the Finals with 35 first-half points.

June 14, 1992: Jordan scores 33 points and wins his second championship with a 97-93 win in Game 6 against the Blazers.



Aug. 8, 1992: With 22 points from Jordan, the U.S. Dream Team wins a gold medal with a 117-85 victory against Croatia at the Barcelona Olympics.

1992-93

October 1992: Jordan’s name surfaces in drug and money-laundering trial of convicted cocaine dealer James “Slim” Boulter. Jordan initially says a check to Boulter for \$57,000 was a business loan. Under oath, Jordan acknowledges the check was payment for gambling losses.

Jan. 8, 1993: Jordan reaches 20,000 career points, becoming the second-fastest to do so, behind Chamberlain.

May 24, 1993: Jordan sparks controversy by gambling in Atlantic City casinos the night before Game 2 of the Eastern Conference finals against the Knicks. He’s criticized the next night for shooting 12-for-32 in a 96-91 loss.

June 20, 1993: The Bulls win their third championship. Jordan has 33 points, eight rebounds and seven assists against the Phoenix Suns in the clinching 99-98 Game 6 victory.

June 22, 1993: The Bulls celebrate a third NBA title in Grant Park.

1st retirement

July 12, 1993: On the eve of baseball’s All-Star Game, Jordan competes in a celebrity home-run derby.

Aug. 3, 1993: A decomposed body is found in Gum Swamp Creek, about 60 miles southwest of Fayetteville, N.C. Two days later, a Lexus is found near Fayetteville with the vanity license plate UNCO023 missing.

Aug. 13, 1993: Officials identify the body as that of James Jordan, Michael’s father.

Sept. 7, 1993: Daniel Andre Green and Larry Martin Demery are charged with first-degree murder, armed robbery and conspiracy to commit armed robbery as suspects in the slaying of Jordan’s father.

Oct. 5, 1993: Jordan throws out the first pitch at a White Sox game.

Oct. 6, 1993: Jordan announces his retirement from basketball: “I just don’t have anything else to prove.”

Nov. 6, 1993: In his first appearance at Chicago Stadium since his retirement, Jordan receives his championship ring.



Baseball

Jan. 13, 1994: A Bob Greene column runs on Page 1 of the Tribune in which Jordan makes his intentions clear regarding the White Sox: “I want to go to spring training for one reason, and that’s to make the team. ... This is no fantasy.”

Feb. 7, 1994: Jordan agrees to a minor-league contract with the White Sox.

March 4, 1994: In his first exhibition game, Jordan taps out in his one at-bat.

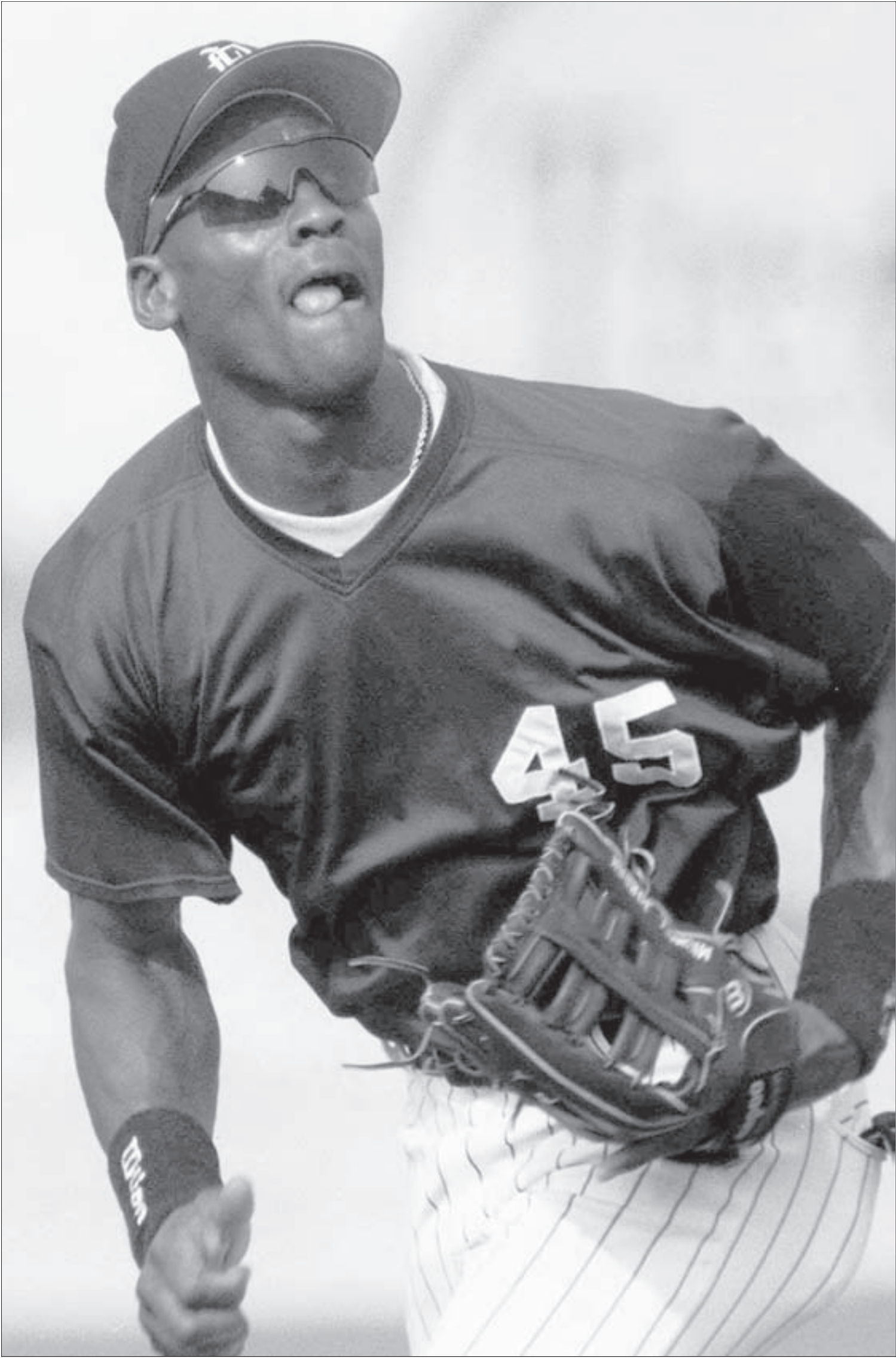
March 14, 1994: After an 0-for-14 start to spring training, Jordan notches his first hit, a grounder off the third-baseman’s glove. It’s also the date on a Sports Illustrated cover with the headline “Bag It, Michael: Jordan and The White Sox Are Embarrassing Baseball.”

April 8, 1994: Jordan debuts with the Birmingham Barons and goes hitless in three at-bats.

April 10, 1994: Jordan gets his first hits as a baseball pro, singling twice.

July 1, 1994: The Bulls announce that they will retire Jordan’s number in November—and unveil a bronze statue of him outside the United Center.

Birmingham



Birmingham Barons outfielder Michael Jordan shags flies during pregame warmups in Hoover, Ala. AP FILE PHOTO

Never saw it coming: The baseball decision that transforms a small city in a heartbeat

So there Birmingham sat, minding its own business, content with what it was — a major banking center, the rapid heartbeat of the state’s obsession with University of Alabama football and a testament to what heat and humidity can do to otherwise straight hair.

Sure, there had been talk in 1994 that Michael Jordan might end up here while he scratched his silly itch to be a baseball player. But nobody in his right mind believed it, or at least nobody in his right mind allowed himself to believe it. His Airness playing here in Hoover, Ala., for the Birmingham Barons, the White Sox’s Double-A affiliate.

And Bear Bryant was going to emerge from the grave to sing show tunes on Broadway. “He goes to spring training with the Sox and he starts hitting and people start to think this might happen,” said Curt Bloom, then and now the Barons’ radio play-by-play announcer. “I said there’s no way. It’s going to get to the last day, and he’s going to say, ‘Experiment over with.’ There’s no way I’m going to be watching this guy play. It can’t happen. I think a lot of the city was as doubtful, as skeptical, as disbelieving as I was. “It instantly, unquestionably, unfathomably changed the second we knew he was coming. Then the phone started ringing, and the story began.”

The story. What an absurd story it was, when you think about it. Arguably the most famous athlete on the planet decides to retire from basketball at the height of his career with the Bulls. Not only does he quit the game he dominates — the game that has brought him three NBA titles and three MVP awards — but he decides to take up baseball, a sport he hasn’t played since high school. A crazy story about a 31-year-old man going through a midlife crisis about a decade too soon. Crazy, but it happened. And it happened here, as if the finger of God had reached down, tapped the Birmingham area on the shoulder and indicated, “You’re not going to believe this one.” “It was like the R.E.M. song,” Barons general manager Jonathan Nelson said. “It was the end of the world as we knew it.” Jordan’s father, James Sr., had been killed while being robbed the year before, and MJ said he wanted to honor his dad’s love of baseball. James had always said he thought his boy was going to become a major-league player. But like this? It was such an audacious move. What kind of person believes he can quit his job and become an elite performer in another line of work — a line of work he has had

nothing to do with for 14 years? A kind of person like Michael Jordan. The Sox didn’t want to insult him by assigning him to a lower-level minor-league team, and they weren’t going to put him in Triple A and watch him get chewed up by hardened veterans. Birmingham, full of top young prospects, made perfect sense. The Sox announced the move March 31, 1994. “For the first couple weeks, we could not make an outbound phone call,” said Nelson, who was a 24-year-old member of the Barons’ ticket office at the time. “We had six phone lines. People were calling for tickets, jerseys and everything under the sun. They wanted to be part of it. “It was the most incredible experience, and nothing can hold a candle to it to this day. This is my 17th year in baseball, and it was one of those seasons where everything was out the window. It was like going to a Lakers game because you had celebrities show up — Kenny Rogers, the singer. Charles Barkley was a fixture. Cornelius Bennett. Chi Chi Rodriguez. “It was a roller-coaster ride. There were some great days and some not-so-great days.” A great day was the day the news arrived that Jordan would be spending the season in Birmingham. A not-so-great day arrived a few days later, when Barons officials remembered that a local sponsor had handed out 65,000 free tickets to area schools to be used for the first Sunday home game of the season. It was a promotion that had been going on for

Barons							
DOUBLE A SOUTHERN LEAGUE							
SEASON	GAMES	AB	HR	RBI	SB	AVG.	E
1994	127	436	3	51	30	.202	11
Totals	127	436	3	51	30	.202	11

many years, and historically, less than 5 percent of those tickets had been used. They had been dispersed well before there was talk of Jordan coming to Birmingham, and now the Barons faced the prospect of 65,000 children and their angry parents descending upon the ball-park for his third game as a minor-leaguer. The stadium seats 10,800. Team officials called a news conference after stories began to appear about the baseball team that snatched tickets away from kids. It was about this time that the Barons realized they were in for more than a season-long swoosh of happiness. They resolved the mess by allowing the free tickets to be used for any game Monday through Thursday until late June. Jordan’s first game was actually the Barons’ second. He played for the Sox in the Windy City Classic exhibition game against the Cubs at Wrigley Field, going 2-for-5 with two runs batted in, then headed to Birmingham for his April 8 debut. He started in right field against the Chattanooga Lookouts, wearing No. 45, his high school number. The radio announcer was ready. “I didn’t want to overdo it — ‘Oh, my God, it’s Michael Jordan!’ — and then I sound like a fool,” Bloom said. “I said real slow and clear, ‘That will bring up Michael Jeffrey Jordan.’ ” It might have been the last understated thing about the Barons for the next five months. Jordan flied out in his first at-bat and finished the game 0-for-3. Attendance was 10,359, not including the 130 national and international media members. His first hit came in his eighth at-bat, against Knoxville, on that Sunday when all the schoolchildren might have been fighting each other and security officers for seats at Hoover Metropolitan Stadium. It was the beginning of a 13-game hitting streak. The streak gave life to the idea that perhaps Jordan was the real thing, that rare human being who can take one set of skills and transfer them to another arena and succeed. Well, no. He couldn’t hit a slider. But one thing could not be argued: The man could run. He stole 30 bases that season and covered a lot of ground in right field. There was something else about him: He might go 0-for-4 in a game, but he seemed to have a knack for driving in a man from third with less than two outs. His first home run arrived July 30 against the Carolina Mudcats. It traveled about 380 feet before landing over the left-center-field wall. It came in his 354th at-bat and raised his average to .189. The homer was impressive because the ball-park (it’s called Regions Park now) is not a hitter’s park. It’s a big field, and hard-hit balls tend to lose interest in the thick humidity. When Jordan rounded third base, he pointed to the sky. His father’s birthday was the next day. There were rules. Staff members were not allowed to ask for Jordan’s autograph. Then-manager Terry Francona fined players \$5 for using the words “circus” and “rock star” to describe the MJ phenomenon. Jordan was to be treated like one of the guys, because that’s what he wanted to be. The Barons learned as they went along. “There was one time that year where there was a guy who posed as Scottie Pippen,” Nelson said. “He actually got to just about opening the clubhouse doors because he had talked his way down there. The guy looked nothing like Scottie Pippen. It was a pretty good attempt.” Jordan brought George Koehler, his longtime assistant, with him to Birmingham. The Barons added security personnel, assigning two off-duty Hoover police officers to Jordan if he went out to a restaurant or a bar. At least one person didn’t think it was enough. “His mother got upset because we didn’t have a lot of officers out here to cover him,” said Billy Fields, the Barons’ head of security. “I think she wanted more people around him all the time, where nobody could see him. But he didn’t want that.” Jordan lived alone at Greystone Golf & Country Club in Hoover, the Birmingham suburb where the Barons play. Fifteen years later at Regions Park, a taped public-address advertisement from a local real estate agent lets fans know she found Jordan his home. Few Michael-philies will bat an eye at the news he played a lot of golf while a Baron. He also picked up a basketball once in a while. Barons players, coaches and staff members often played pickup games at a court outside Francona’s apartment complex. “Sure enough, one August day, up comes the Mercedes,” Bloom said. “It just so happens that, absolute stroke of luck, I’m on the court three-on-three, and he’s on my team. I said to myself again, ‘This is absolutely not happening.’ “I’m 6-foot and he’s 6-6. The ball comes to

Birmingham

“It instantly, unquestionably, unfathomably changed the second we knew he was coming. Then the phone started ringing, and the story began.”

Continued from **Previous Page**

him. I’m thinking, ‘OK, what do you do?’ So I go over and pick his man. He looks down at me and waves me off. He says, ‘CB, I don’t need that.’ Then he hits a 30-footer.

“I know Michael really enjoyed that. He said, ‘You’re going to tell a lot of people about this, aren’t you?’ ”

Yes, Michael. The answer is yes. Bloom would tell the story over and over.

Word had spread that Jordan was playing that day, and people from the apartment complex lined the court to watch. Francona took the last shot for his team and missed, allowing the other squad to hit the winning basket. Unfortunately, Jordan was his teammate.

“Don’t you know I always take the last shot?” he said to Francona.

In 1994, the franchise set records for anything that involved counted numbers: attendance, cars parked, hot dogs sold, goose bumps, you name it. The Barons averaged almost 3,000 more fans a game that season than they did in 1993, when they won the Southern League championship. Little Leaguers in Birmingham fought to wear No. 45 in honor of Jordan the Baseball Player, not 23 in honor of Jordan the Basketball Player. When the baseball strike hit in August, ESPN did what every network did when it wanted to increase ratings. It turned to Jordan, televising several Barons games.

Hanes, Gatorade and Ball Park Franks shot commercials in Birmingham.

It was a five-month-long tornado. What was left in the wake of Jordan’s celebrity?

“I give a lot of speeches to civic clubs and a lot of organizations here,” Nelson said. “This organization has been around since 1885. Some great players. But the No. 1 question is not really about whether Michael Jordan was good or not. It’s, ‘Do you still have the bus?’ ”

Ah, the bus. The Jordan Cruiser. It became the embodiment of the miracle that had been visited upon Birmingham. It was living proof that Air Jordan had descended and was moving about among the people. He rode the bus with teammates and coaches most of the time, except when he had prior commitments involving endorsements or appearances.

Mostly, he slept in the back of that bus.

Three companies spent \$337,500 to custom-build the vehicle for Jordan and the Barons, thinking, rightly, that someone of his stature would not enjoy the 400-plus-mile ride from Birmingham to Jacksonville on a bus in its senior years. The bus had a lounge area in the back where a 6-foot-6-inch man might be able to lie down if he contorted himself enough. It had TVs, video players and a stereo, and at the time was considered state-of-the-art.

But it wasn’t Jordan’s bus, as many people had wrongly assumed.

“That turned into an urban legend,” Nelson said. “He posed for an advertisement for the bus company and he signed some autographs for the bus company. But he didn’t own the bus.

“He did upgrade the quality of the bus, no doubt about it. But no matter which way you slice it, a bus drive to Orlando, Florida, or to Greenville, South Carolina, is still going to be the same.”

The arrival was a different story.

“Every day, you didn’t know what to expect,” said Kirk Champion, the Barons’ pitching coach at the time and now the Sox’ minor-league pitching coordinator. “We’d pull into Orlando at 2 in the morning, and the hotel lobby would be packed.”

That Barons team had Steve Sax, a former All-Star, on a rehab assignment. Pitcher Atlee Hammaker, who also had played in an All-Star Game, was on the club. Nobody was in the hotel lobby for a peek at them.

This phenomenon of a superstar living at eye level with everyone else — has there been anything comparable? Elvis Presley being drafted into the Army and finding himself among regular soldiers comes to mind.

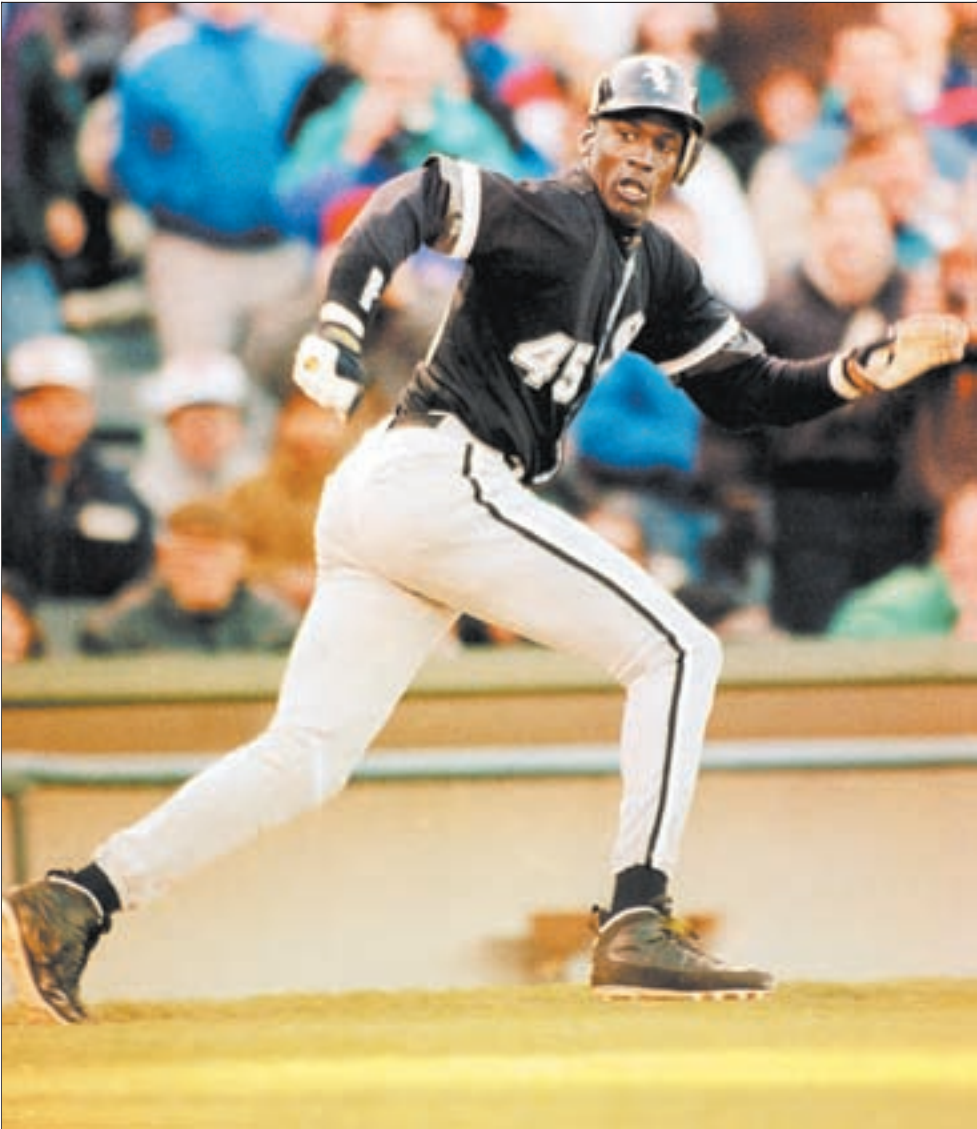
“We were the Beatles, we were the Rolling Stones,” Bloom said.

Two rock star references? That will be \$10 to Francona.

In 2001, the Barons stopped using the bus. Thrasher Brothers Trailways, the Birmingham company that owned the Jordan Cruiser, sold it two years ago to Wilson Luxury Tours of Washington D.C. The bus, which now has about 800,000 miles on it, made regular treks from Washington to New York. Wilson recently



Harry Caray interviews Jordan before the 1994 Windy City Classic. **AP FILE PHOTO**



Jordan gets caught in a rundown at Wrigley. **AP FILE PHOTO**

sold it to a Wyoming finance company, which is in the process of selling the bus to a company in Durham, N.C., where it surely will be popular a few miles down the road, in Chapel Hill.

Jordan’s autograph is on both doors.

Jordan finished the season with a .202 batting average, three home runs and 51 RBIs. He struck out 114 times in 127 games, too much. He knew it.

But that’s not the story of what happened here. In his third-to-last game, on Aug. 27, the Barons drew a record crowd of 16,247, using the grassy expanses beyond the first- and third-base lines to cram more people in. That’s the story. A bursting-at-the-gills story. A possible fire-code-violation story. The story is the franchise’s home-attendance record they set (467,867) and the 518,318 fans they drew on the road.

The story is the insane largeness of it, and how a team and a community joyously bore the weight.

“When you talk to somebody outside of Birmingham, you say, ‘This is where Michael Jordan played,’ and they say, ‘Oh, yeah, now I’ve got you,’ ” Bloom said. “It’s not like, ‘This is where Frank Thomas played, this is where Joe Borchard played.’ Who didn’t know in America that Jordan

was playing minor-league baseball somewhere? Maybe you didn’t know where, but you knew he was doing his thing.

“And this is where it was. The legacy is in your mind. For the staff members and the people that worked here and the fans that came out, that’s what you have to hold onto. You have to cherish those memories and realize whether he’s here or never comes back, he was here and you’ve got that recall that says, ‘He was here. He was part of it. For a whole summer.’ ”

Jordan’s jersey hangs framed in the Barons’ offices. A room at the ballpark is called the Michael Jordan Banquet Room. But other than that and the Jordan jerseys the franchise still sells, you won’t find much more physical evidence that he played here.

If you use your imagination, you can feel the emptiness of his departure. For the longest time, the wind whipped across the empty seats, and life didn’t seem nearly as exciting.

After Birmingham, Jordan played for the Scottsdale Scorpions in the Arizona Fall League. But he was fighting a losing battle, and he knew that too. He retired from baseball on March 10, 1995. Eight days later, he sent out a press release with two now-famous words: “I’m back.”

July 30, 1994: Jordan hits the first home run of his pro career, then points to the sky as he crosses home plate, in tribute to his father.

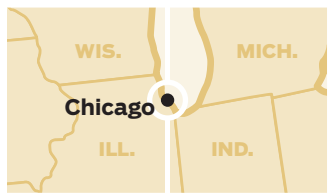
Sept. 9, 1994: Jordan plays in the Scottie Pippen All-Star Classic—the final game at Chicago Stadium—and scores 52 points. He kisses the Bulls logo on the floor at game’s end.

Nov. 1, 1994: Jordan’s No. 23 jersey ascends to the rafters in the United Center—though it gets momentarily stuck halfway up.

Feb. 18, 1995: Day 1 of White Sox workouts during the players’ strike. “I’m not here to break down what the players are trying to achieve,” Jordan says.

March 2, 1995: Jordan stuffs his stuff into a Bulls duffel bag and leaves Sox training camp, after management said players would be moved to a minor-league clubhouse.

March 10, 1995: Jordan quits baseball, citing the sport’s labor dispute’s effect on his development.



The return

March 18, 1995: “I’m back.”

March 19, 1995: Starting at guard ... No. 45? Jordan plays 43 minutes and scores 19 points in his first game back, a 103-96 overtime loss at Indiana. “I really, truly missed the game,” he says.

March 28, 1995: The Double Nickel. Jordan scores 55 points and dishes the game-winning assist in a 113-111 win at Madison Square Garden.

May 10, 1995: For Game 2 of a playoff series against Orlando, Jordan puts No. 23 back on. He scores 38 points in a 104-94 win.

May 18, 1995: Jordan shoots 8-for-19, scores 24 points and the Bulls’ season ends with a Game 6 loss to Orlando.

1995-96

July 1, 1995: The NBA locks out its players.

Oct. 6, 1995: Jordan’s first day of training camp since 1992. “I feel I can do basically the same things, but I’m more knowledgeable about myself and about the game,” he says.

Oct. 23, 1995: Jordan and new teammate Dennis Rodman appear on the cover of Sports Illustrated. It is Jordan’s 34th appearance, surpassing Muhammad Ali for most ever.

Nov. 3, 1995: Jordan scores 42 in the season opener.

Jan. 24, 1996: The Bulls, at 36-3, set a club record with a 27th straight win at home.

Jan. 28, 1996: Jordan scores 31 and the Bulls set a franchise record with a 15th straight win.

Feb. 11, 1996: In his first All-Star Game since 1993, Jordan scores 22 points in 20 minutes and earns game MVP honors.

March 7, 1996: Jordan hits 21 of 28 shots for an NBA season-high 53 points in a win over the Pistons.

April 12, 1996: The Bulls win their 68th game, surpassing the franchise record set in 1992.

April 16, 1996: Jordan shoots just 9 of 27 for 22 points, but the Bulls win an NBA-record 70th game anyway.

April 21, 1996: Jordan scores 26 as the Bulls end the regular season with 72 wins. Jordan (30.4 ppg) leads the NBA in scoring for a record eighth time.

May 20, 1996: Jordan wins his fourth MVP award, getting 96.5 percent of the first-place votes, the highest percentage since media began voting in 1980-81.

May 27, 1996: Jordan scores 45 to exact revenge on Orlando for the previous year’s playoff ouster, sweeping the Magic and gaining the NBA Finals.

June 16, 1996: On Father’s Day, Jordan wins his fourth NBA title with the Bulls. Afterward, he brings the trophy to the dressing room, embraces it and weeps.

1996-97

July 12, 1996: Jordan agrees to a one-year contract with the Bulls worth \$30 million.



Nadine Hamilton at a Barons game. **BUTCH DILL/PHOTO FOR THE TRIBUNE**

Longtime Birmingham Barons fan: ‘He was part of the family’

HOVER, Ala. — It’s 83 degrees on an August night, which is nothing compared with the night before, when the Birmingham Barons played the Mobile BayBears in sweltering conditions and spectators were futilely fanning themselves with scorecards.

Nadine Hamilton, 82, is getting ready to take her seat behind the Barons’ dugout. There are perhaps 500 people in the stands.

She and her husband have been season-ticket holders for 17 years.

Hamilton said she and Michael Jordan used the same dry cleaners.

“He was part of the family around here,” she said. “He talked with everybody. I’d take things down there and give them to him all the time. We fed him all the time. We fed him steak one time. We fed him lasagna. Ham. My husband made homemade ice cream. It was great, and he loved us all too.”

Hamilton acknowledged it’s not easy sometimes.

“This is a good training place for the White Sox,” she said. “[Sox general manager Ken] Williams comes down here, and I say, ‘Leave my boys alone until I get ready for you to take them.’ And he says, ‘OK, Miss Nadine, we won’t touch them.’ Well, the next week, he’s got one of them.”

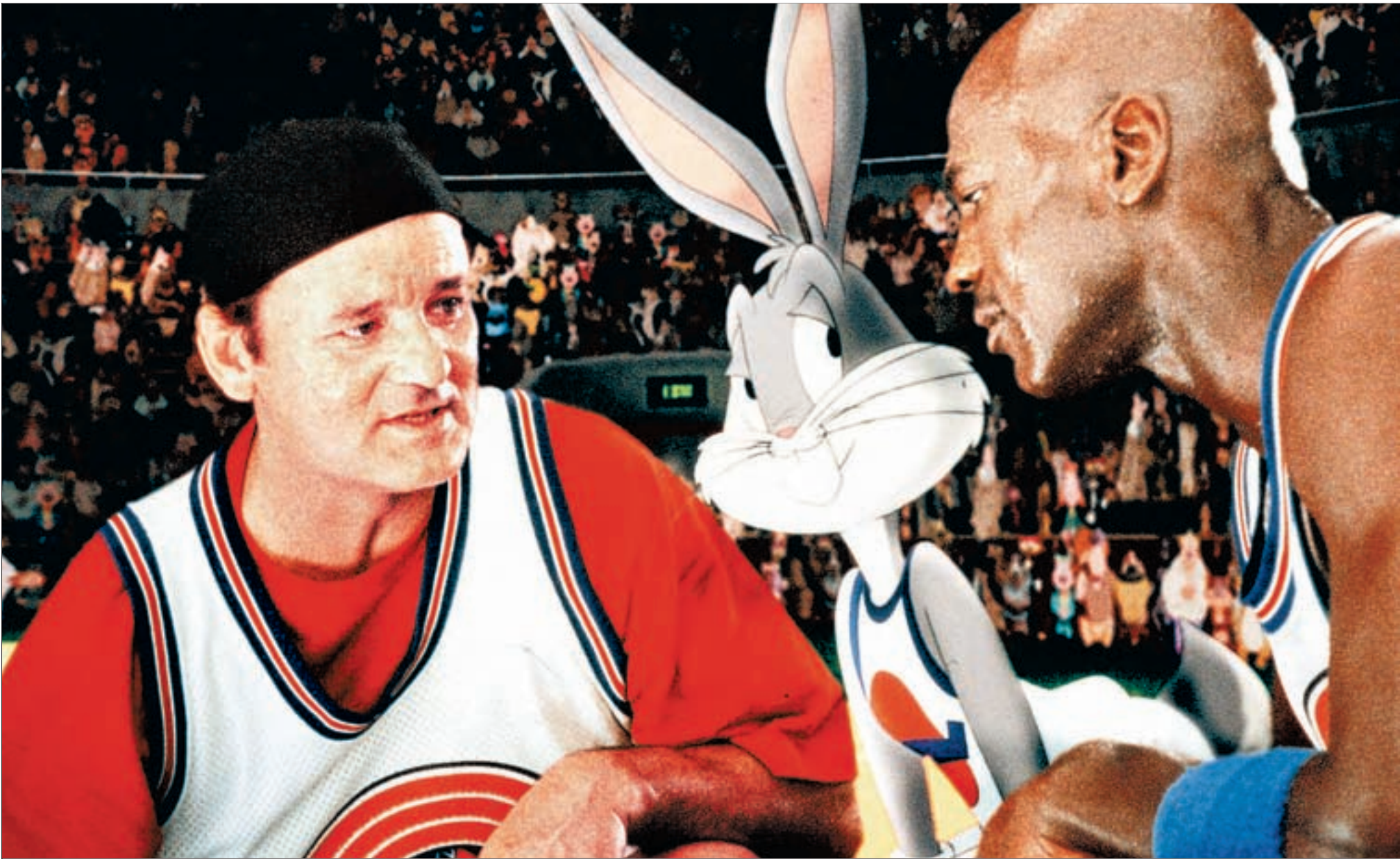
If it were only the players she loses.

“If the players need something, they holler,” she said. “One time, one of them asked, ‘Miss Nadine, I need some king-sized sheets.’ I said OK. The next day, I threw the sheets over the dugout to him and told him to get them back to me in three weeks. He went to the White Sox, and I never saw him or the sheets again.”

The Jordan year was magical. Big crowds. A lot of energy.

“I expect him to come back and see us sometime,” she said. “You never know. He might as well walk in here, just sit down and talk to us.”

—Rick Morrissey



Bill Murray, Bugs Bunny and Michael Jordan in the 1996 movie "Space Jam," which earned nearly \$320 million at the box office worldwide, and billions in merchandising. WARNER BROS. PHOTO

Los Angeles

The accidental movie star goes one-on-one with Bugs Bunny—and they both prevail

Stage 22 at Warner Bros. had gone from a movie shoot to a receiving line. One by one, bigwig after bigwig, glad-hander after glad-hander, men and women had started to come to the studio daily just to meet the star. Shake his hand. Take his picture. Rub his head. Whatever they wanted, the star obliged, one interruption after another, smiling through gritted teeth.

"The first week of shooting, nobody came to the stage until they started looking at the dailies [unedited footage shot each day] of Michael, and they were blown away," "Space Jam" director Joe Pytka said inside his home office. "Then they couldn't stay away. It got out of hand for awhile after they

By David Haugh

him for publicity and every day they'd bring in some dignitary to meet him and that started to piss him off."

One day, about halfway through the six-week process, a fed-up Jordan called a timeout to confer with Pytka. They had a rapport from Pytka's directing Jordan's Nike and Gatorade commercials.

"Michael turned to me and said, 'I thought you said this would be [expletive] fun.'" Pytka said. "I said, 'It should have been.' He said, 'So why isn't it?'"

"I just think he hated the whole experience, every aspect of it," Pytka said. "Remember, in basketball, you're in total control of everything. In a movie, you're at the mercy of everybody — the director, cinematographer and in this case Bugs Bunny and a green screen."

"Standing in front of a camera and remember your lines, acting is a devastatingly difficult profession, trying to create those emotions. ... We were very, very careful that Michael was comfortable when he came on the set. The stuff that irritated him was the PR stuff."

In the late summer of 1995, months removed from his return from his first retirement, Jordan was co-starring with Bugs Bunny in what would turn out to be a box-office hit. With apologies to Scottie Pippen, Jordan has never had a more popular or profitable sidekick.

Pytka wanted Michael J. Fox to share the marquee in the role of publicist Stan Podolak, but finding an established star willing to work with a novice and a cartoon character wasn't easy. Jason Alexander of "Seinfeld" fame said, "Thanks, but no thanks," according to Pytka. Same for Chevy Chase. They settled for Wayne Knight — Newman on "Seinfeld." "Nobody wanted to be in this movie," Pytka said.

It was understandable. "Space Jam" combined animation with live action, not to mention a scene-stealing professional athlete making his first movie. Jordan was an accidental movie star, brought to Hollywood after his longtime agent, David Falk, approached Warner Bros. with an idea borne out of the wildly popular 1992 Super Bowl commercial "Hare Jordan." In the Nike spot combining action and animation, Jordan and Bugs play one-on-one basketball in what amounts to the movie's trailer.

"Originally, I just couldn't think of a bigger star to pair Michael with than Bugs Bunny, so that's how it started," Jim Riswold, the ad man behind the "Hare Jordan" commercial, said from his Portland, Ore., home. He also was the brains behind successful Nike campaigns such as "Bo Knows" and "I Am Tiger Woods."

"I am forever astonished that any commercial I did was popular, let alone have a movie made from it, but if it put Bugs back in the public eye, that's great," said Riswold, a cartoon buff. "The best thing about that spot to me was that after it was out, Michael thanked me personally and told me it was his kids' favorite commercial — because of Bugs Bunny, not him."

Siskel on 'Space Jam' ★★★★★^{1/2}

Better than Shaq in 'Kazaam'

An excerpt from the late Gene Siskel's review of "Space Jam," originally published in the Chicago Tribune on Nov. 15, 1996.

Our Flick of the Week is "Space Jam" — you may have heard of it. A certain basketball player teams with cartoon characters to defeat — it would be silly, wouldn't it, if I wrote, "tries to defeat" — animated aliens threatening to wreck the Looney Tunes gang as well as an array of NBA stars ranging (in height) from Shawn Bradley to Muggsy Bogues, a span of 27 inches.

How good is Michael Jordan playing himself? Very good. He wisely accepted as a first movie a script that builds nicely on his genial personality in an assortment of TV ads. The sound bites are just a little longer. He also delivers dialogue that is as sharp as what comes from his public persona. In other words, he doesn't play a character who is hard to believe, nor does he play a dumbed-down version of himself. Sounds obvious? Tell it to Shaquille O'Neal and his dumb genie character in the disastrous "Kazaam." Movie score: Bulls 1, Lakers 0.

Michael's assets as a film star are many. He is great-looking; his eyes sparkle, and he has a star aura. All that holds him back from establishing a career is script selection. Supporting roles and working with good directors should figure into the mix. Bill Murray is fine for broad comic relief as Michael's teammate, and Wayne Knight from "Seinfeld" manages to fill out the traditional fat guy role with a measure of dignity. By the way, tell your kids you want to wait a few days before seeing "Space Jam." The lines will be long and the frustration level (if you get shut out) will be high.

Falk pushed for the movie, as much for its merchandising potential as for its box-office appeal. Warner Bros. had been looking for the right vehicle to revive its "Looney Tunes" franchise and Falk sold the studio on Jordan's charisma and well-established track record as America's foremost pitchman.

"We believe Michael Jordan transcends the world of sports," Falk said in his appeal to Warner Bros.

It was during filming of "Space Jam" that the Bulls first entertained the idea of signing Dennis Rodman. During a break on the set, before the Bulls' interest in The Worm was public, Pytka asked Jordan

why he didn't want to play with Rodman.

"Michael says, 'Because he is a crazy man and the only person I know who's crazier is you,'" Pytka said. "I was, like, 'Are you an idiot? All he does is play defense and rebound. You need somebody else to shoot?' ... So where was Rodman that night? Staying at the Beverly Hills Hotel where Michael was staying because they were scheduled to have a meeting to get to know each other better."

"From that day on, he would call Rodman, 'your boy' ... We had constant arguments about everything. It was great."

Jordan spent hours away from the set inside a temporary indoor gymnasium Warner Bros. built near the studio especially for Jordan. NBA stars such as Reggie Miller and Magic Johnson stopped by for pickup games, and Jordan worked out with trainer Tim Grover. It was in that mini-gym where Jordan, committed to reshaping his body for basketball after a foray into baseball, would lay the groundwork for the Bulls' 1995-96 championship season.

Pytka called the gym the "Jordan Dome," and the director took great pains to stay on a strict production schedule that called for Jordan to start filming at 9 a.m., work till 1



"I just think he hated the whole experience," says director Joe Pytka of Jordan filming "Space Jam." "In basketball, you're in total control. ... In a movie, you're at the mercy of everybody." BUDWEISER PHOTO

Bugs and Daffy Duck. The green covering was replaced with animation in post production.

Cinesite, the company that created "Who Framed Roger Rabbit," merged the live action and animation with the input of 150 animators. All Jordan had to do was keep a straight face while playing basketball against men dressed in green suits.

"That way he could play against a guy, not a stick, which would have been ridiculous for him," Pytka said. "One day a guy came who was 6-10, 350, and we had to put him in a green suit. Michael cracked up."

Jordan's acting itself was never going to get him confused with Sydney Poitier; his favorite actor: But for a guy making his first movie, given the time constraints Jordan was under; Pytka believed Jordan delivered a solid performance. In basketball terms, it would have been a 15-point, 7-rebound effort.

"He was playing himself, the easiest thing in the world to do, so he was serviceable," Pytka said. "I broke the scenes down so he wouldn't have to sustain a performance. A third of the way through, the editor wanted me to do full takes, which made it a little more difficult. But Michael was a foil for Bugs, so he didn't have to act."

Jordan gave himself an honest but unflattering self-evaluation at the 1996 New York City premiere.

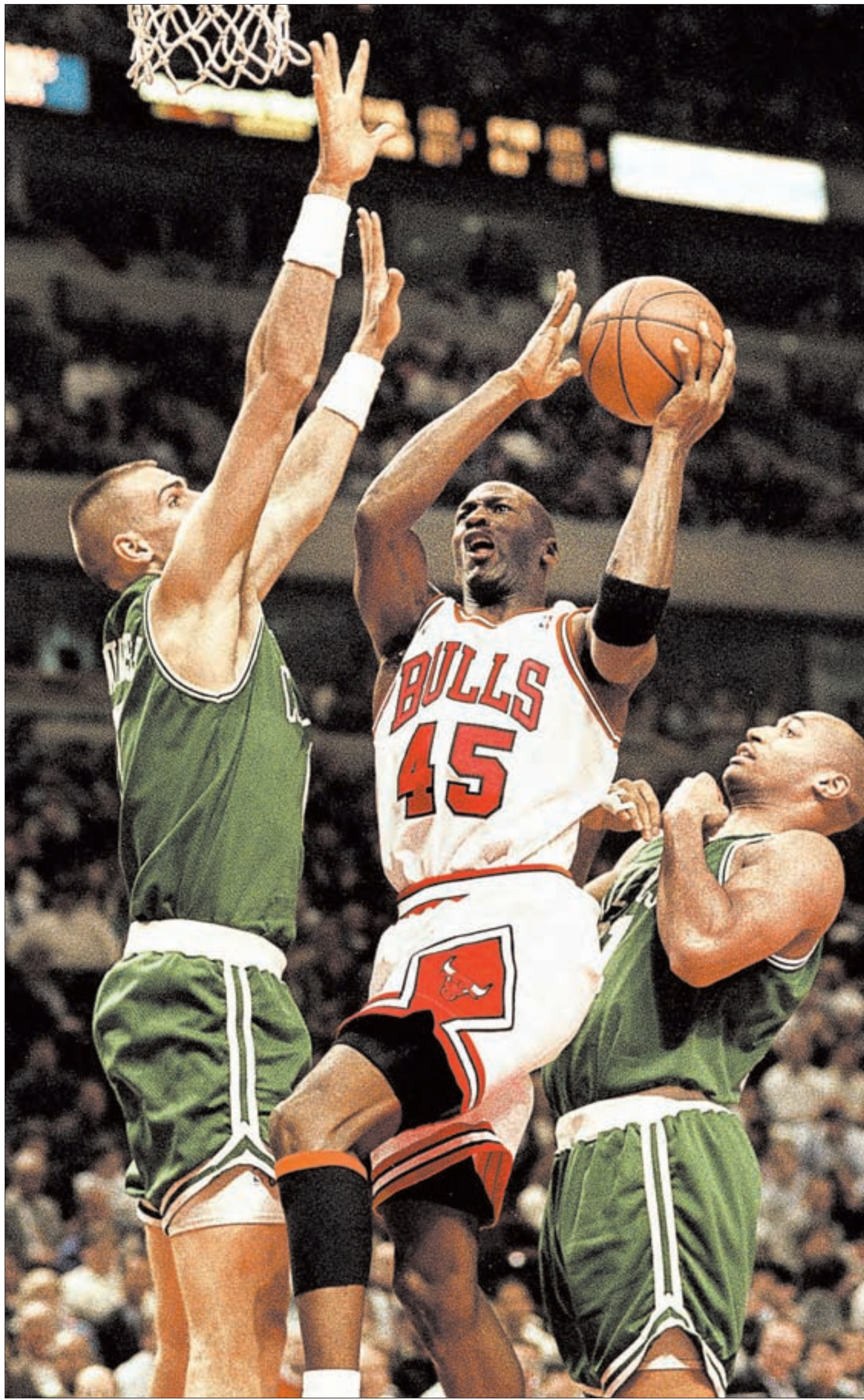
"I'm a learning actor, I can't say I'm good," Jordan said. "This is a whole new arena. I've done commercials, which means four-hour, six-hour days. This is a long process, very meticulous, especially when you're trying to match up with an animated character you can't see."

The stat sheet for "Space Jam" is impressive. Its box-office box score: The film cost an estimated \$90 million to make but grossed \$90.4 million in U.S. theaters and \$230 million worldwide. Jordan's salary has never been disclosed. The soundtrack went platinum six times and the hit single "I Believe I Can Fly," by Chicago's R. Kelly, won a Grammy. And Falk was right: The merchandising was even bigger, selling \$1.2 billion. There are 78 "Space Jam" tie-in products that bear Michael Jordan's likeness, everything from edible cake decorations to shower curtains to toothbrush holders.

One industry insider estimated the global economic impact of the "Space Jam" franchise over the years at \$4 billion to \$6 billion, a number Pytka says sounds accurate. "It just shows you the power Michael had that transcended sport," Pytka said. "Try making a movie like that with Kobe Bryant ... please. And Shaq did a couple movies that tanked. Dwight Howard wants to do a movie but, really? LeBron [James]?"

"No. ... Nobody has what Michael has. Ever."

Chicago



Jordan, wearing No. 45, drives between Boston Celtics' Eric Montross (left) and Derek Strong during a March 1995 game. TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

The United Center and the statue become ground zero for a socioeconomic renaissance

Start with the statue.

The idea sounds cliché, almost pedestrian, when gauging the impact of Michael Jordan's second, more dominant run with the Bulls from 1995-98.

But then you arrive outside Gate 4 of the United Center on a sunny, sticky day, 12 minutes ahead of 7-year-old Elijah Abreu. The kid is sporting spotless Air Jordans and a smile that surely makes his father, Ernesto, believe the trip from Miami paid off.

Sixteen minutes later, a group of 15 from the First Indonesian Seven-Day Adventists Church camp shows up. They are driving from New Jersey to Wisconsin and just had to make this pit stop.

"He's the greatest player ever," said Julia Sulu, the group's leader. "All the kids want to play like him."

By K.C. Johnson

Three minutes later, cousins Francisco and Nicolas Arias cap their Lollapalooza weekend by stopping by before heading back to San Diego.

"He's the whole reason I play basketball," the 34-year-old Francisco said.

As the cousins snap pictures, four people who don't speak English arrive from Spain, starting a dizzying run of

visitors that makes Gate 4 of the United Center feel like the United Nations.

Alex, 17, from Cologne, Germany. Karoline Adamczyk, 21, and Maja Sitarz, 21, from Poland. Fans from Finland, Italy and Hong Kong, and the pace proves too great to record all their names.

"Everybody in my country wants to see this," said Adamczyk, who played high school basketball in Kielce, Poland. "It's very popular in Poland, so I couldn't come to Chicago and not come here. ... People will be jealous when they see my pictures. He created big hysteria there."

All in all, it's six countries and five U.S. cities in one stinking hour. And Lee Graziano, a longtime United Center security guard, just laughs when asked if this is an aberration.

"It's like this *all the time*," Graziano said.

No way. Really?

"It's mind-blowing," said Steve Schanwald, the Bulls' executive vice president of business operations, as he looks out his office window onto the statue. "I don't care what time you leave this building, someone will be there, taking a picture. How long will that last? It's been 11 years since he retired from the Bulls! I don't know anything that better encapsulates his lasting impact than that."

Jordan's lasting legacy takes you to unpredictable places, like the beautiful studio in Ft. Sheridan, where Omri Amrany and his wife, Julie Rotblatt-Amrany, work. There, statues or busts of other sports figures rest comfortably among more modern, abstract pieces of art.

This is a nod to the market the Rotblatt-Amrany union created for themselves by creating the Jordan statue, which the Bulls commissioned in 1994 to honor his first retirement.

"Omri and I have always been artists and we always will be non-reflective of how we do outside in the business world," Rotblatt-Amrany said. "Whether you sell this piece or that piece, art is a matter of



The statue outside the United Center. On it, an inscription reads: "He stood before us, suspended above the Earth, free from all its laws like a work of art."

BRIAN CASSELLA/TRIBUNE PHOTO

expressing yourself. But Michael definitely opened a huge door for us and helped us find a niche in the sports world. Being in the middle of all that hoopla was really inspiring and unleashed our creativity."

Schanwald, the Bulls' marketing boss, had asked the artists to create the illusion of flight. They met with Jordan, taking photos of him, measuring his hands, head and body, recording his jumps.

Amrany was born and raised on a kibbutz in Israel's Jordan Valley and came to the U.S. with his wife, who was raised in Highland Park, in 1989. Five years later, their paths intertwined with the world's most famous athlete.

"If you think about Michael Jordan, he never was the tallest or strongest," Amrany said. "He was not the No. 1 player drafted; that was Hakeem [Olujuwon]. Everybody saw this potential but nobody measured his spirit, the spirit that dominated the NBA for a decade, the spirit of a human who can fly the highest, maneuver the craziest ways and coordinate personalities as disparate as [Scottie] Pippen and [Dennis] Rodman around him."

"That's why we named the piece 'The Spirit.'"

Of course, the Bulls had commissioned the statue to honor Jordan's first retirement in October 1993. The official unveiling occurred on Nov. 1, 1994.

On March 18, 1995, Jordan returned with his famously and dramatically direct fax that simply said, "I'm back."

"The comeback actually started a good week before anyone knew what was going on," said Bill Wennington, a center on the Bulls' second three-peat team. "Michael had come back and practiced with us a couple times before. He'd show up, do all the drills, scrimmage at the end, take off and that was it."

"This time, the second day, halfway through practice I remember talking to Steve Kerr and Steve was like, 'He's taking this really serious today.' Something was up. Then he comes back the third day and you're kind of like, 'He's working way too hard for a guy that just wants to have fun.'"

"We started asking questions: 'Mike, what are you doing?' He goes, 'Eh, I'm thinking about it.' Maybe in his mind he was just seeing if he could still do it, if he still wanted to do it."

In just Jordan's fifth game after his experiment with baseball, he dropped 55 points on a defensive-minded Knicks team at Madison Square Garden. He also passed to Wennington for the game-winning basket in the Bulls' 113-111 triumph.

"It was surreal watching him that game," Wennington said. "The Knicks were doing everything. He said to me, 'You know why I passed to you? Because I trusted that you were going to do your job.' But I already knew that about Michael. He's not going to pass you the ball if he doesn't have confidence in you. He's not going to do something that he doesn't think will win."

"He just slapped me on the back of the head and said, 'Good job. You did your job.' That's his legacy to me, doing whatever it took to win."

Ernest Gates is one of those quiet powers whose sleepy eyes belie his influence. Gates grew up in the neighborhood surrounding first the Chicago Stadium and now the United Center and has seen the area's highs and lows.

He works mere blocks from the latter building as executive director of the Near West Side Community Development Corporation, a non-profit organization he helped create in 1988.

"Our little ragtag band," as Gates put it, blocked the Chicago Bears' bid to develop a West Side stadium and then worked closely with Bulls Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf and the late Blackhawks owner Bill Wirtz on the United Center proposal. The building opened on Aug. 18, 1994, while Jordan was playing baseball.

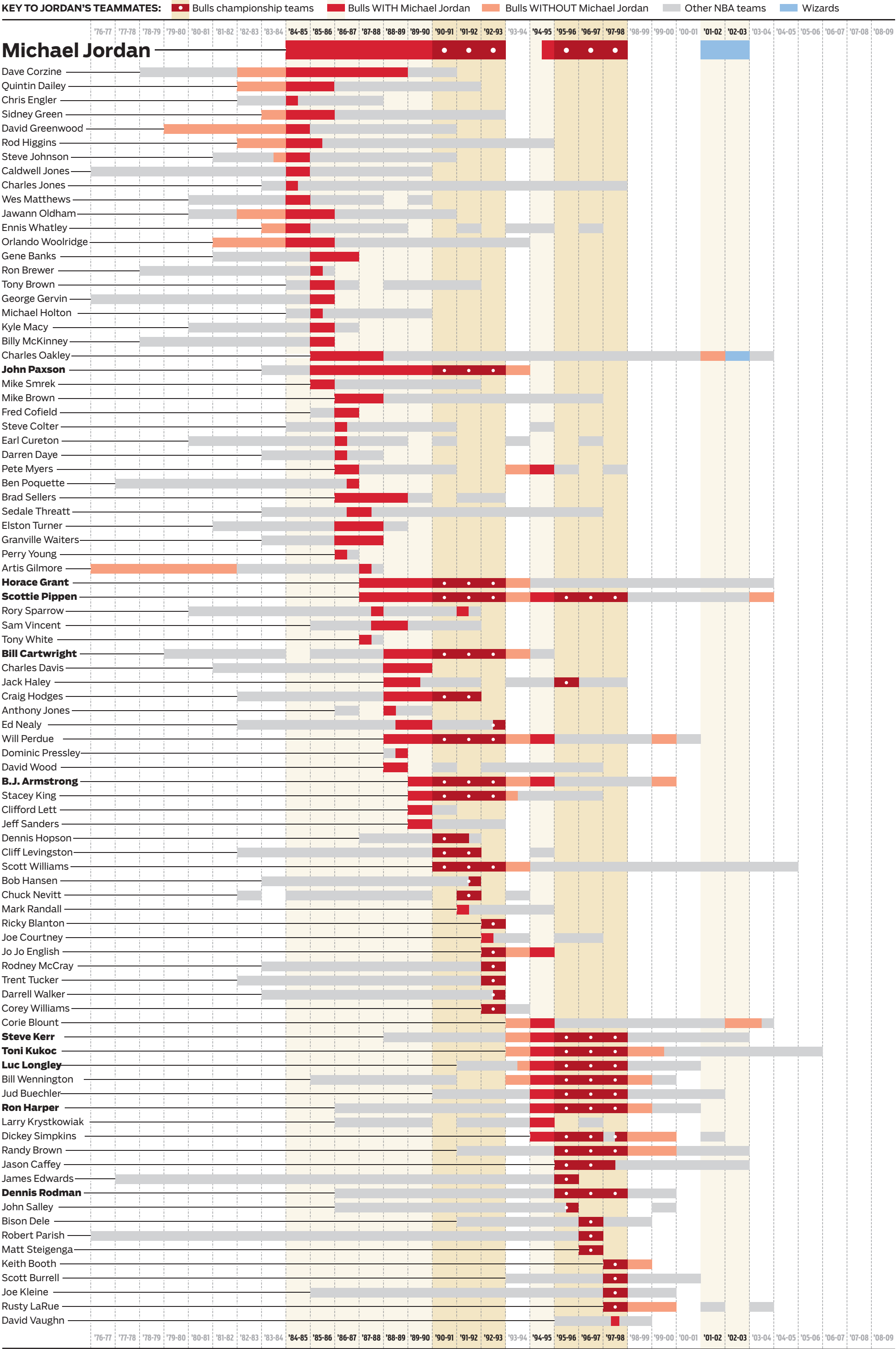
"Michael built the value of the franchise, which enabled us to build the United Center," Reinsdorf said.

And Gates helped marshal a West Side transformation that continues today.

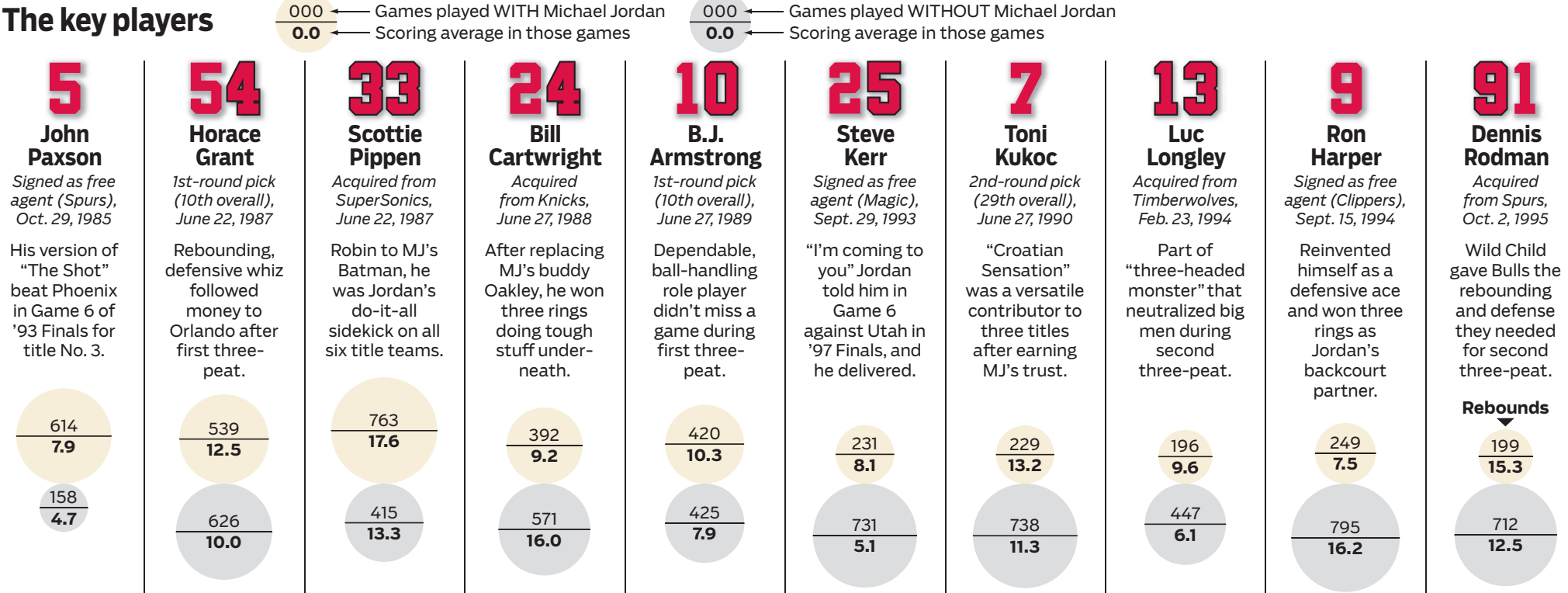
"They got the United Center," Gates said in a nondescript conference room inside

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The supporting cast



The key players



Chicago: The dynasty is complete

“The comeback actually started a good week before anyone knew what was going on.”



Don Reed (top), director of the James R. Jordan Boys & Girls Club, with Brijon Burtley (left) and Douglas Leftridge. BRIAN CASSELLA/TRIBUNE PHOTO

Continued from Page 23

his organization’s modest office. “We got the first new single-family housing in about 45 years. We got an economic development fund. We got a library. We got the [James R.] Jordan [Boys & Girls club]. We got a computer center. We got a health center, a drug store.

“We got a host of community amenities that we probably otherwise wouldn’t have. And we have a great relationship with the Wirtz family and [White Sox executive] Howard Pizer and Jerry Reinsdorf. It’s a real relationship. And I don’t use that term loosely.”

Jordan isn’t the sole reason for the West

Side’s transformation, but several business and community leaders insist he’s the biggest because of the impact of the Bulls’ success.

And Jordan’s family name is on one building, the Boys & Girls club, which was dedicated in 1996 for his murdered father. Brijon Burtley was born that year, the year the Bulls won their fourth championship and set an NBA record with 72 victories.

Burtley, 13, now is one of many kids who create the daily hustle and bustle inside the club, whose mission, according to director Don Reed, is “the positive socialization of young people from disadvantaged circumstances.”

Reed said roughly 200-250 kids attend the

center during the school year, where everything from tutoring to leadership programs are offered. During the summer, roughly 65 kids attend a summer camp where field trips are frequent and the game room and arts and crafts room get heavy workouts.

Inside the center’s conference room, Burtley and Douglas Leftridge, 14, explained why they’ve been coming to the same building virtually every day for eight years.

“It’s safe and it’s fun to tell people that we go to Jordan’s club,” said Leftridge, who either wants to be an NBA player or

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‘Probably the hardest time for me’

In June 1991, James Jordan sat by his son Michael, who had joyous tears streaming down his cheeks as he finally tasted championship glory inside a raucous Los Angeles locker room.

Five years later, on Father’s Day, James’ spirit is what compelled Michael to collapse into the fetal position on the United Center floor as the Bulls’ fourth championship celebration took flight.

Just shy of three years after two teenagers woke a napping James at a North Carolina rest stop, then robbed and murdered him, Michael accepted his fourth NBA Finals Most Valuable Player Award with his father on his mind.

“This was probably the hardest time for me to play the game of basketball,” Michael said on June 16, 1996, after the Bulls closed out Seattle. “I had a lot of things in my heart and on my mind ... and maybe my mind was not geared to [the game].

“I think deep down inside, it was geared to what was most important to me, which was my family and my father not being here to see this. I’m just glad my team pulled me through this because it was a tough time for me.”

Some of those who have known Jordan the longest and have been closest to him spoke eloquently of the bond Jordan shared with his father, whom he called simply “Pops.” During Jordan’s rise to fame, he often talked about his father’s ability to keep him grounded and openly referred to him as his best friend.

“There’s no question where Mike came by his love of baseball; that was his dad’s



Michael Jordan celebrates with his dad after the Bulls beat Portland to win the 1992 title. REUTERS FILE PHOTO

sport,” says Dick Neher, Jordan’s Babe Ruth League baseball coach. “James and I worked together at the GE plant for 20 years. He never missed a game, and he rarely missed one of Mike’s practices. They were extremely close, and they remained so.”

Whispers of Jordan possibly retiring early began shortly after police arrested Daniel Green and Larry Demery and charged them with murdering James Jordan, who was 56, on July 23, 1993. A fisherman discovered James’ body in a creek on Aug. 3. Ten days later, he was identified using dental records. Just shy of two months later, on Oct. 6, Michael Jordan left basketball at 30. And while Jordan didn’t cite the loss of his father as the only reason, he addressed the tragedy at his

packed news conference at the Berto Center.

“I’m a very optimistic person and I guess the most positive thing I can take from my father not being here with me today is that he saw my last basketball game,” Jordan said then. “And that means a lot.”

Teammates and friends who watched Jordan celebrate the Bulls’ first three championships with his father understood how losing him had influenced his retirement decision.

“I can’t say I was shocked, because he was so close to his dad,” says John Paxson. “I always felt this way: If retirement is what he wanted, you had to be happy for him. If some burden would be lifted or that could clear his mind, well, there’s nothing wrong with that. He deserved it.”

Added James Worthy, a teammate at North Carolina: “[The murder] had to affect him, close as they were. My folks kept going to the games after I left Carolina and they’d sit with the Jordans, so we knew them very well. They were a very close family, a very nice family.”

On March 12, 1996, a jury chose life in prison over the death penalty for Green. Two months and eight days later, a jury sentenced Demery to life in prison as well.

And then, on Oct. 14, 1996, Jordan attended the opening of the James Jordan Boys & Girls Club and Family Life Center a few blocks from the United Center.

At the center is a plaque that shows James Jordan smiling—looking much like Michael did that 1991 night in Los Angeles.

—K.C. Johnson

- Jan. 21, 1997:** Jordan once again torments the Knicks, this time scoring 51 points.
- Feb. 9, 1997:** Jordan posts the only triple-double in All-Star Game history—14 points, 11 rebounds, 11 assists—but Glen Rice is named MVP after scoring 26 points.
- April 14, 1997:** Jordan scores 30 and the Bulls reach win No. 69—but then lose their last two to miss back-to-back 70-win seasons.
- April 27, 1997:** Jordan explodes for 55 points in Game 2 of a first-round playoff series against Washington.
- May 18, 1997:** Karl Malone edges Jordan 986-957—no one else got a first-place vote—for Malone’s first MVP award. It was the second-closest voting since 1980-81.
- June 11, 1997:** In what would become known as the “Flu Game,” a vomiting, dehydrated Jordan scores 38 points, grabs seven rebounds, dishes out five assists and hits the go-ahead three-pointer late in a series-shifting Game 5 win in Utah.
- June 13, 1997:** Jordan scores 39, grabs 11 boards, dishes to Steve Kerr for the game-winning jumper and then dances on the scorer’s table after the Bulls win their fifth NBA title.

1997-98

- Aug. 28, 1997:** After coach Phil Jackson signs a one-year contract, Jordan inks a one-year, \$36 million deal.
- Feb. 8, 1998:** Jordan once again earns All-Star Game MVP honors.
- April 18, 1998:** Jordan drops 44 on the Knicks to seal his 10th NBA scoring title with 28.7 points per game.
- May 18, 1998:** Jordan wins his fifth regular-season MVP award, tying Bill Russell for second-most in history.

- June 14, 1998:** In one of the most clutch performances in NBA history, Jordan scores 45 points in Game 6 against the Jazz for a sixth title. With the Bulls down three, he records a steal and two scores in the final 37.1 seconds, including “The Pose” after the shot over Bryon Russell—a 17-footer (with a bit of a push-off) with 5.2 seconds to go.
- June 27, 1998:** At his celebrity golf tournament in North Carolina, Jordan says he’s “leaning” toward retirement.

2nd retirement

- July 23, 1998:** Tim Floyd is announced as Bulls coach. Jordan previously was emphatic that he had no desire to play for anyone not named Phil Jackson or Dean Smith.
- Oct. 13, 1998:** NBA cancels first two weeks of the regular season.
- Jan. 13, 1999:** Jordan announces his second retirement and says there’s a “99.9 percent” chance it will stick.



The Wizards

- Jan. 19, 2000:** Jordan joins the Washington Wizards as part owner and president of basketball operations.
- April 19, 2001:** Jordan hires Doug Collins, his former coach with the Bulls, to coach the Wizards.
- Sept. 10, 2001:** Jordan says he will make a decision about his future within 10 days.
- Sept. 25, 2001:** At 38, Jordan unretires again and joins the Wizards as a player, signing a two-year contract and donating his salary to relief efforts after the 9/11 attacks.

2001-02

- Oct. 30, 2001:** In his first game as a Wizard, Jordan scores 19 points on 7-of-21 shooting in a loss to the Knicks.

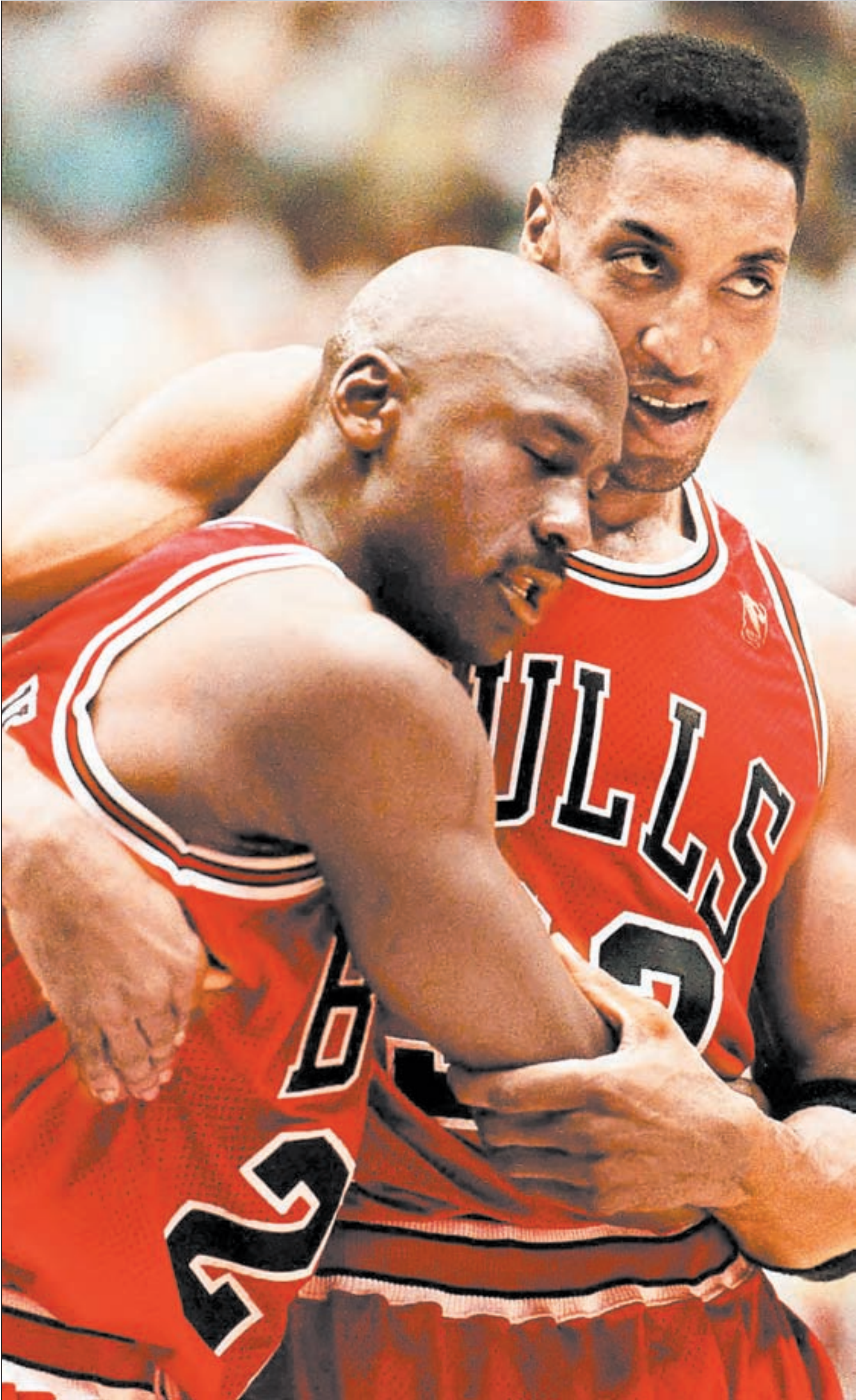
- Jan. 4, 2002:** Juanita Jordan files for divorce. One month later, the Jordans jointly withdraw the divorce case.
- April 2, 2002:** Jordan scores two points in 12 minutes in a loss to the Lakers. The next day he’s placed on the injured list, ending his season.

2002-03

- Oct. 30, 2002:** Jordan comes off the bench for the Wizards, scores just eight points in 25 minutes and botches a late breakaway dunk attempt.

Chicago: The dynasty is complete

“There are other ways kids can be Michael Jordan. They can be Michael Jordan in medicine or law. They can soar in other fields as high as Mike did on the basketball court.”



Scottie Pippen assists a flu-ridden Jordan during Game 5 of the 1997 Finals. Jordan made the Jazz sicker, scoring 38 in a win. TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

Continued from [Previous Page](#)

sports agent. “My favorite program is ‘Passport to Manhood,’ which teaches you how to be a man and always think forward to what you have to do in your life.”

Leftridge lights up when talking about Jordan’s occasional appearances at Christmas parties. Burtley does the same detailing her presidency of the Torch Club, a leadership program.

Both speak eloquently of what the club means to them.

“I feel that no matter what Boys & Girls club we go to, we can do our best,” Burtley said. “But here we have a certain responsibility because we have to carry out the Jordan name. For the Jordan family to act one way, the Jordan club has to act the same way.”

Gates met Jordan once, when he spoke at the opening of the club. Gates said Jordan liked what he said.

“I talked about the fact that Michael wasn’t the one to aspire to because there’s only going to be one Michael Jordan,” Gates said. “But there are other ways kids can be Michael Jordan. They can be Michael Jordan in medicine or law. They can soar in other fields as high as Mike did on the basketball court.”

The message took flight.

“I want to be a pediatrician,” Burtley said.

Any quest to gauge Jordan’s impact must include a visit inside the United Center. The Bulls’ front office is an atypically close-knit bunch, full of employees who have stayed 30-plus years and count what they do as their only post-college job.

Joe O’Neil easily became one of the city’s most popular—and recognizable—figures during the Bulls’ heyday as the senior director of ticket operations. O’Neil had what everyone wanted, including Jordan.



Coach Phil Jackson and Jordan embrace after the team’s dramatic 87-86 victory over the Jazz in Game 6 of the NBA Finals. It was their last game together. TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

Bulls

REGULAR SEASON				PER GAME AVERAGES		
SEASONS	GAMES	FG%	POINTS	REBS.	ASTS.	
1984-85	82	51.5	28.2	6.5	5.9	
1985-86	18	45.7	22.7	3.6	2.9	
1986-87	82	48.2	37.1	5.2	4.6	
1987-88	82	53.5	35.0	5.5	5.9	
1988-89	81	53.8	32.5	8.0	8.0	
1989-90	82	52.6	33.6	6.9	6.3	
1990-91	82	53.9	31.5	6.0	5.5	
1991-92	80	51.9	30.1	6.4	6.1	
1992-93	78	49.5	32.6	6.7	5.5	
1994-95	17	41.1	26.9	6.9	5.3	
1995-96	82	49.5	30.4	6.6	4.3	
1996-97	82	48.6	29.6	5.9	4.3	
1997-98	82	46.5	28.7	5.8	3.5	
Bulls	930	50.5	31.5	6.3	5.4	
Career	1,072	49.7	30.1	6.2	5.3	

PLAYOFFS				PER GAME AVERAGES		
SEASONS	GAMES	FG%	POINTS	REBS.	ASTS.	
1984-85	4	43.6	29.3	5.8	8.5	
1985-86	3	50.5	43.7	6.3	5.7	
1986-87	3	41.7	35.7	7.0	6.0	
1987-88	10	53.1	36.3	7.1	4.7	
1988-89	17	51.0	34.8	7.0	7.6	
1989-90	16	51.4	36.7	7.2	6.8	
1990-91	17	52.4	31.1	6.4	8.4	
1991-92	22	49.9	34.5	6.2	5.8	
1992-93	19	47.5	35.1	6.7	6.0	
1994-95	10	48.4	31.5	6.5	4.5	
1995-96	18	45.9	30.7	4.9	4.1	
1996-97	19	45.6	31.1	7.9	4.8	
1997-98	21	46.2	32.4	5.1	3.5	
Career	179	48.7	33.4	6.4	5.7	

“He would kill me,” O’Neil said, laughing. “I remember being in the locker room once during the Finals and I said, ‘Scottie, Michael, I got four tickets each for you. Don’t ask me for more.’ And Michael goes, ‘I need 20,’ just threw me under the bus.

“I talked to him a couple months ago and told him I oughta be in the Hall of Fame for handling all his ticket requests.”

Indeed, O’Neil, who joined the Bulls out of college in 1979, said he routinely would request 50-100 tickets per road game for Jordan, so great were his demands for friends and family. In New York and Los Angeles, this number would grow to 200.

O’Neil later fulfilled a lifelong dream by opening a bar downtown that he has since sold. He turns positively pensive when assessing Jordan’s direct impact on his life.

“He gave me a visibility and presence in this town and allowed me to get to know people I otherwise never would’ve,” O’Neil said. “If Michael Jordan hadn’t played here, I probably never would’ve opened my own place downtown because I wouldn’t have had the resources.”

Schanwald, who joined the Bulls in 1986, said he has met presidents, celebrities and played Augusta National because of Jordan. His home includes plenty of Jordan memorabilia as a reminder of, in his words, “the privilege to witness history.”

“Michael made basketball relevant in Chicago,” Schanwald said. “There was a level of prestige he gifted to us by his presence that endures. We created during that era millions of new basketball fans that prior to that time hadn’t existed. Some of the fans that were on the fringes of interest became passionate fans.

“Michael is arguably the most famous athlete who has ever lived, even bigger than Babe Ruth or Pele or Muhammad Ali. We failed three times—the Staggs, Zephyrs and Packers—before the Bulls hit in 1966. And we really didn’t start making profits until 1987, his third season.

“The only bad part is that was about as good as it would ever get because Michael is a once-in-a-lifetime player, maybe once every two or three lifetimes.”

In June 1998, Fortune Magazine published a fascinating look at Jordan’s financial effect, taking into account his brand products; ticket, merchandising and television revenues; his value as an endorser; and his and uberagent David Falk’s net windfall.

The magazine conservatively estimated the above at \$9.94 billion.

Andrew Mroczka isn’t sure about that, but he can speak to the reach of Jordan’s monetary impact.

Mroczka is a molecular biologist in Davis, Calif., who spent five of his formative years in Carol Stream, Ill., and saw Jordan “when he was dunking and had hair” at Chicago Stadium. He now is an avid Jordan basketball card collector who owns 3,600 unique cards and 150 pieces of other memorabilia.

Without bravado, Mroczka said his collection “is in the top five or 10 in the world.” And given this subculture’s knowledge and intensity, don’t doubt him.

Mroczka, 30, said he doesn’t collect for money but if he had to restart, he wouldn’t be able to afford to because his collection is “priceless.”

“He’s the standard of excellence,”

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Chicago: The dynasty is complete

“My ultimate deal was selling four tickets for \$5,000 each to some dude from Indonesia. ... Jordan was like a four-leaf clover or a rainbow. They’re around. But they’re hard to find.”



Jordan nails the final shot to beat the Utah Jazz in Salt Lake City and win the 1998 NBA title, the Bulls' sixth championship in eight years. PHOTO BY MICHAEL PROEBSTING

Continued from *Previous Page*

Mroccka said, when asked why he collects. “Any player that comes into the league now is measured against him. Kobe [Bryant] won a championship [in June] and immediately articles compared him to Jordan.

“This is my way of solidifying my childhood memories of him and my little way of preserving his legacy. I’ve seen him up close at games and celebrity golf tournaments and shaking his hand might be a thrill for me, but he has such a public life that I want to let him have his privacy.”

Another who can attest to the Jordan Effect is a Chicago ticket scalper, who asked that we not give his name.

He is in his early 40s and started hustling as early as the 6th grade. He moved to Chicago in the fall of 1991, with one Bulls championship down and five to come. He estimates he made \$100,000 during the second three-peat alone.

“The last year was incredible because everybody knew it was probably the end,” the scalper said. “The demand was insane. I had access to a couple season ticket-holders, and I had a lot of contacts for

customers in Asia. You could just name a price and, boom, they’d be gone.

“They thought I was like a god that I got them seats, especially if I got them lowers. People would almost start crying: ‘We’re going to be right there with Michael Jordan. Whoa!’ It was a pretty crazy time.”

He said he runs into some of his old running buddies on the street now and they laugh at the memories, knowing cash cows like that historic Bulls run were a once-in-a-lifetime event.

“My ultimate deal was selling four tickets for \$5,000 each to some dude from Indonesia,” the scalper said. “Jordan was like a four-leaf clover or a rainbow. They’re around, but they’re hard to find. And you never know when or if you’re going to see another one.”

Anybody who spent any significant time with or watching Jordan has noticed this effect and addresses it without hyperbole.

Tim Hallam, the Bulls’ longtime public relations director: “Whether it’s a sports fan, a gas-station attendant, a non-sports fan, whoever, he has a way of walking into a room and giving you energy. We’d be on

the road and on the rare occasions he’d go into a bar or restaurant, you could see the whole place change instantly. The energy level would go up. He just has an aura.”

LeBron James, the NBA’s reigning Most Valuable Player: “I remember when I first met him, I was speechless. I didn’t have nothing to say. I had stage fright. It was like he was levitating or something, walking on water.

“Mike made everybody believe they could run and jump high. Mike made me work hard. I wanted to be on that stage and be able to do some of the things he did. He’s the greatest basketball player ever to walk the face of the Earth. Michael Jordan’s legacy speaks for itself.”

O’Neil, the longtime ticket man: “I was with Michael for Johnny Kerr’s tribute. My job was to greet him and take him around. There is an electricity in this building even today when Michael is in it. That night, as we were walking out to the court, fans were just shrieking. And they were young kids, 12- and 14-year-olds. They didn’t even see him play.”

Wennington recalled the time mere hours after Jordan sank his game-winning shot over Utah’s Bryon Russell, holding

the follow-through for the exclamation point on the Bulls’ sixth championship in 1998. The locker-room celebration was over and the team bus prepared to leave for the Salt Lake City airport.

“I opened the escape hatch to the bus and Mike stuck his head out and was hamming it up, waving six fingers, celebrating,” Wennington said. “The crowd outside the bus was going crazy, cheering like mad.

“I looked at his face and he was just so full of joy, so in the moment. And I remember thinking, ‘If he can act like that, who can’t?’ ”

And perhaps there it is, Jordan’s lasting legacy. The joy he played the game with spread to joy and wealth for others. He touched so many lives so deeply.

There’s a quotation from Norman Maclean’s novel “A River Runs Through It” on the back of Jordan’s statue outside the United Center. It reads:

At that moment I knew, surely and clearly, that I was witnessing perfection. He stood before us, suspended above the Earth, free from all its laws like a work of art. And I knew, just as surely and clearly, that life is not a work of art and that the moment could not last.

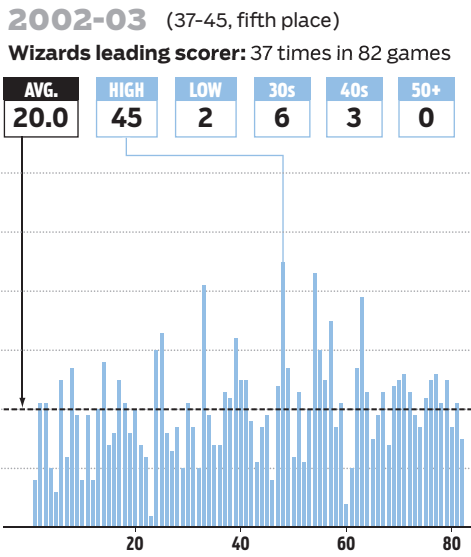
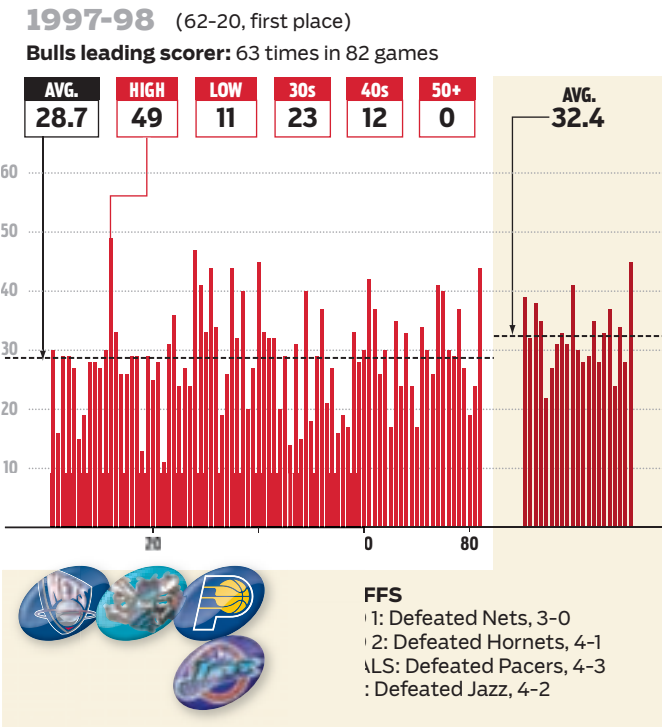
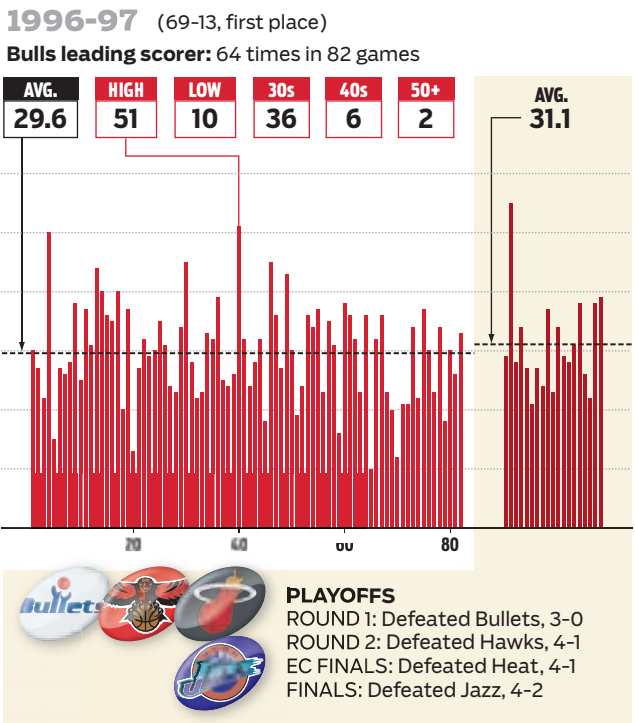
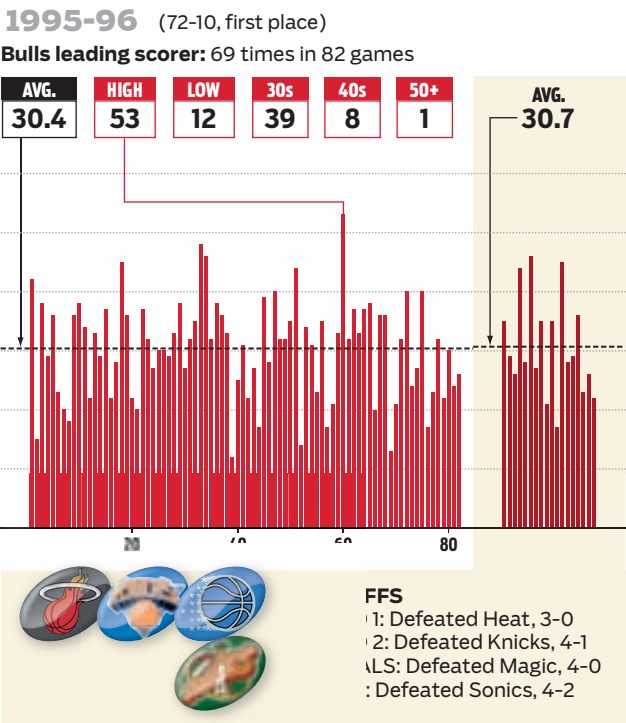
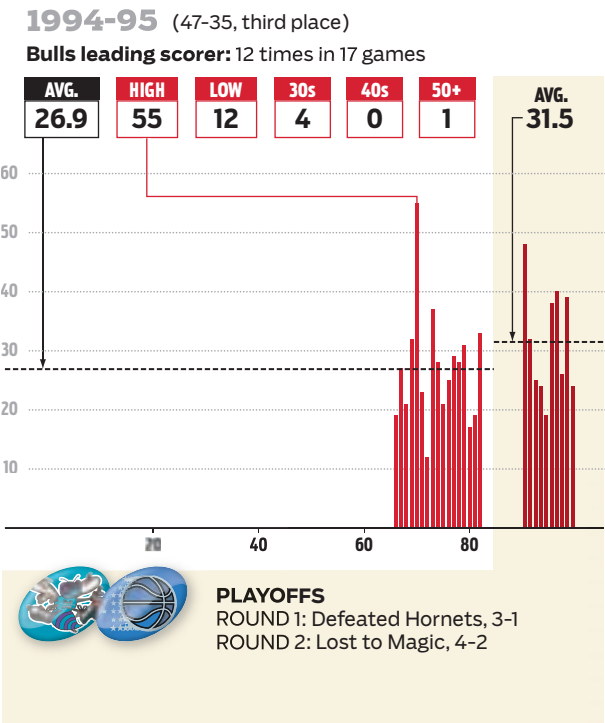
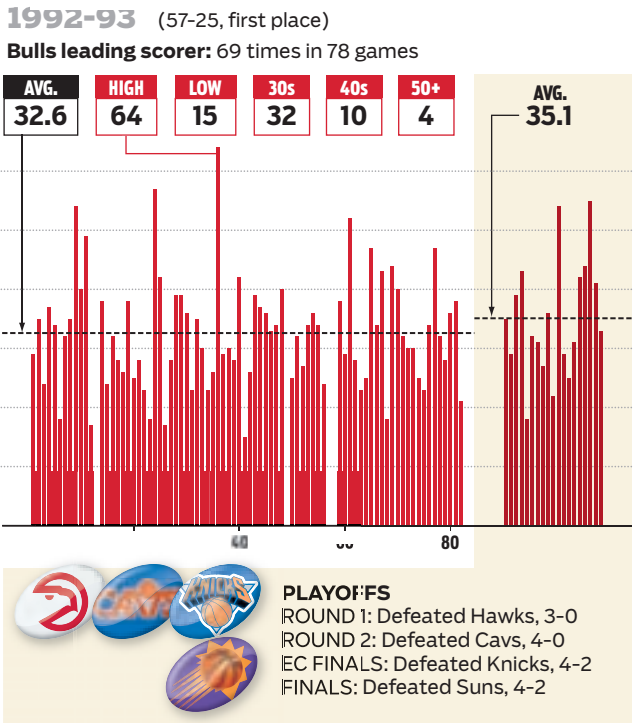
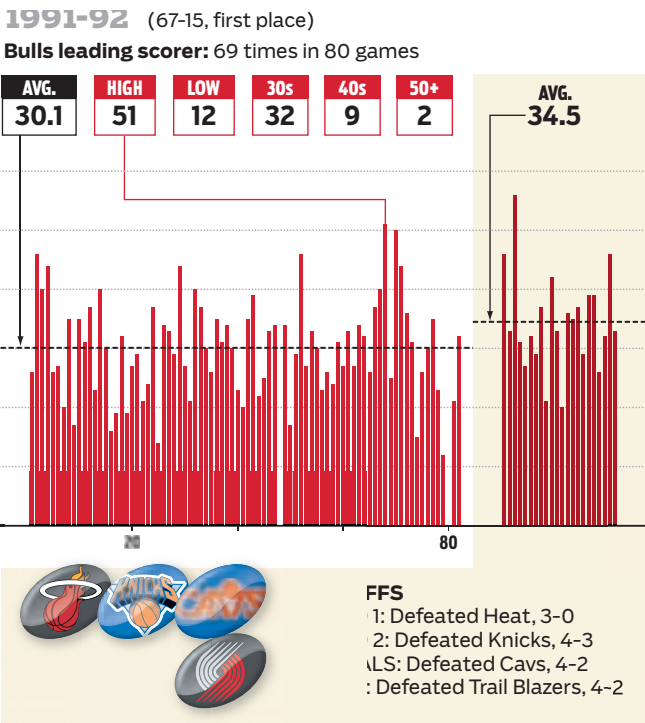
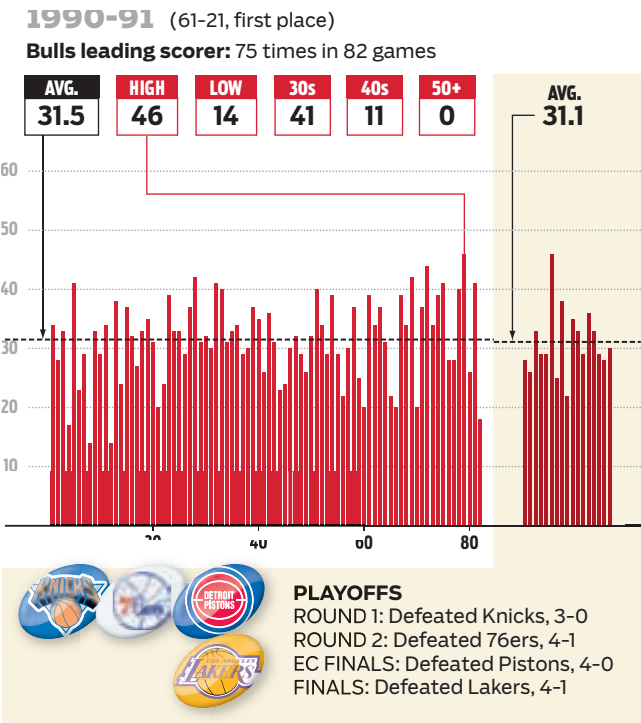
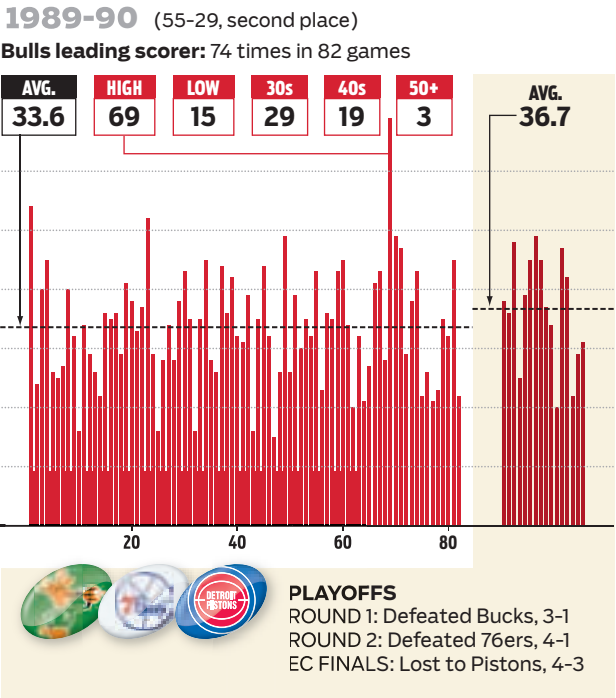
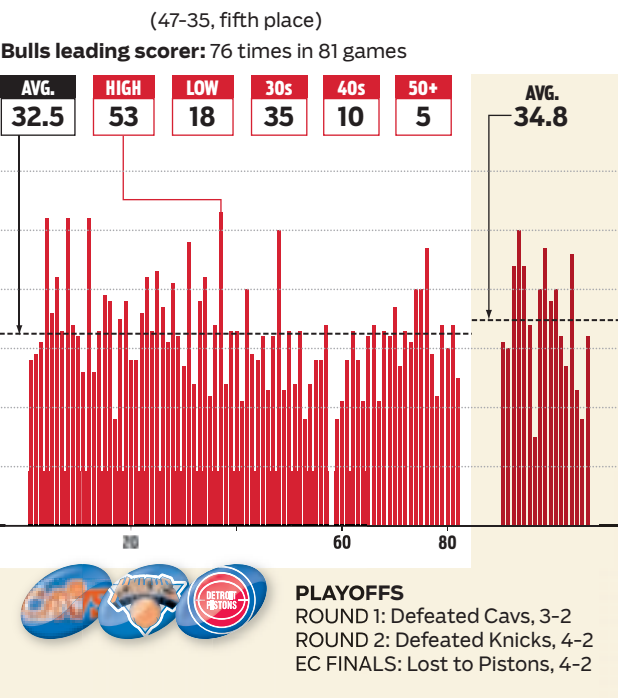
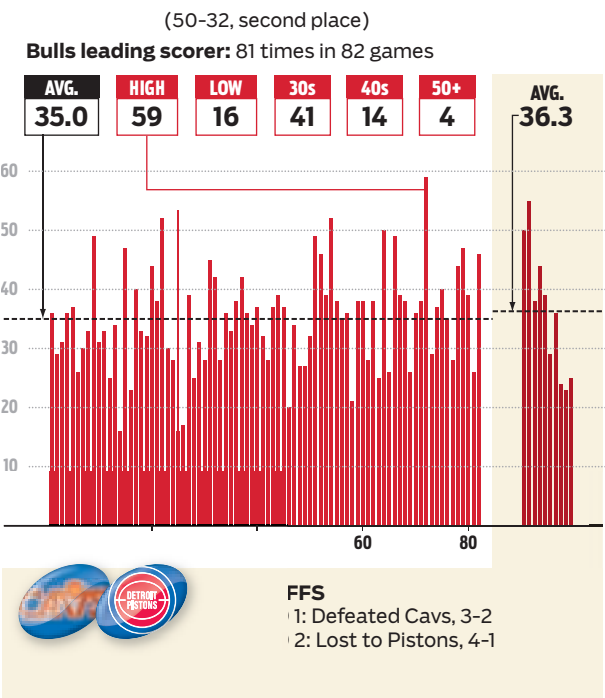
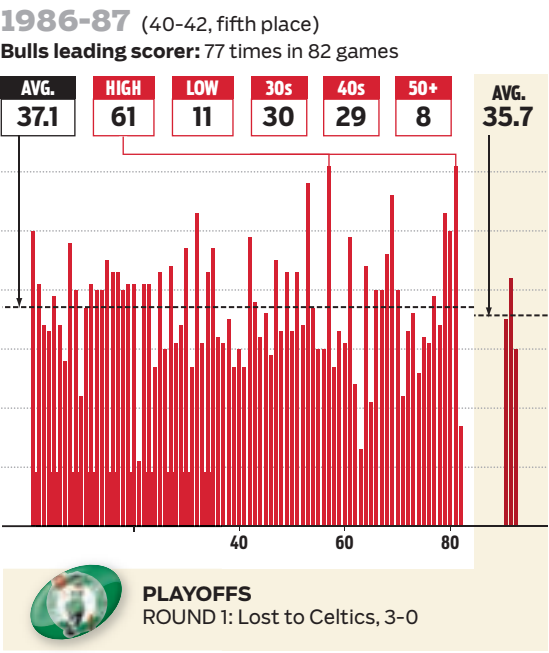
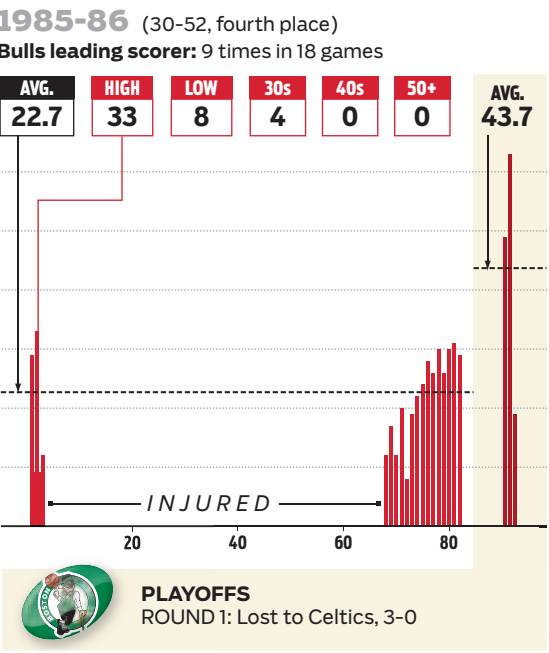
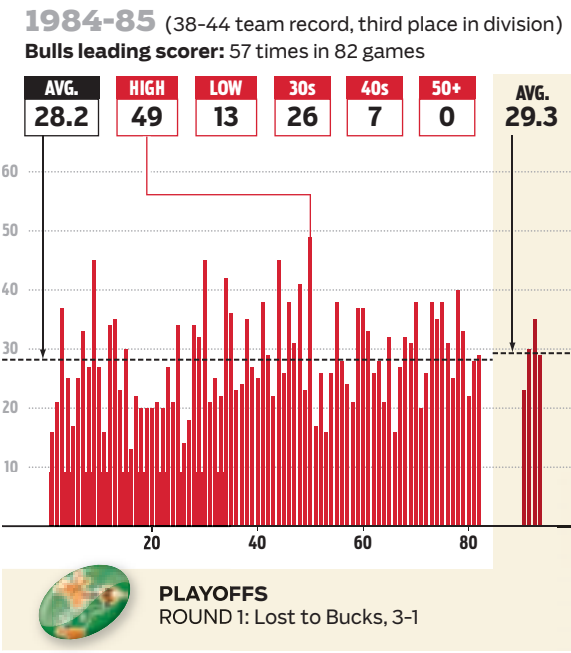


The Grant Park tradition (from left): Toni Kukoc, Ron Harper, Dennis Rodman, Scottie Pippen, Michael Jordan, Mayor Richard M. Daley and coach Phil Jackson. TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

The games

Point totals for Michael Jordan in all 1,072 regular-season and 179 playoff games he played in his NBA career.

REGULAR SEASON CAREER TOTALS						PLAYOFFS
AVG.	HIGH	LOW	30s	40s	50+	AVG.
30.1	69	2	389	142	31	33.4
Points per game	High and low point totals		Number of games scoring in the 30s, 40s and above 50			Points per game





What's wrong with this picture? In his final professional game in Chicago, Washington Wizard Michael Jordan soaks in the United Center. TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

Washington

A remarkable playing career ends—with frustration, betrayal and flashes of brilliance

It wasn't supposed to end like this. Everyone involved seems to agree on at least that much.

Michael Jordan doesn't do bad endings. He might do corny, impossible, save-the-day endings, but not bad endings and definitely not endings in which he might be perceived as anything but the hero.

Like a lot of other stories, this one carries a wistful preamble; and it had started out so well. Jordan was back in the game as the Washington Wizards president of basketball operations, a piece of team ownership in his pocket. This was the king of the NBA finally taking his rightful place on the throne. Most everybody felt good about it in January

By Rick Morrissey

2000, including owner Abe Pollin, who would enjoy the fruits of Jordan's presence until distrust on both sides poisoned their relationship.

The nation's capital was positively elated about Jordan's arrival, especially with the juicy idea that MJ could, might, pretty please don a uniform and come out of retirement. It was the tantalizing possibility that wouldn't go away, especially at street level.

"It excited the whole city," said Otis Walker, pastor of the Signs, Miracles and Wonder Learning Institute in Washington, as he stood outside the Verizon Center one August day. "Everybody kept saying, 'He's going to play, he's going to play.'"

After more than a year of sitting around his Wizards office, Jordan announced in September 2001 that he indeed was going to play again. It wasn't a sign, a miracle or a wonder: It was a man bored out of his mind.

Washington Post reporter Michael Leahy, whose book "When Nothing Else Matters," chronicled Jordan's two seasons as a Wizards player, remembers sitting in Jordan's executive office in December 2000 and seeing a person who didn't know what to do with himself.

"He was looking out the window for a while and at some point I asked him what he was looking at," Leahy said. "He said, 'Nothing really. Sometimes you'll see a kid dribbling a basketball and you wonder where that kid is going.'"

"He just so missed it. We talked about Phil Jackson and Allen Iverson. All these people had games — Iverson, Phil, the kid with the ball. He was stuck like a butterfly under glass in this office."

So out of retirement he bounded, this time as a late-model Superman flying at lower altitudes. He tortured his 38-year-old body into shape and began a two-year journey that made a lot of money for a lot of people. Coming back meant giving up his executive title and his ownership stake, and it took away any control he might have had over his future. It would come back to haunt him.

But at the beginning? It was a glorious thing.

"It was really a dream come true," said Popeye Jones, who played with Jordan in 2001-02. "You knew you were going to play with Michael Jordan. You wanted to show that you belonged on the court with, in my mind, the greatest player who ever played."

Washington came down with a bad case of Wizards fever, a rare condition in a town that had seen years of bad to mediocre basketball. The year before Jordan came out of retirement, the franchise ranked 18th in NBA home attendance. In the two seasons he did play, the Wizards were third and second, respectively. They were 26th in road attendance the season before he decided to come back. They finished second in his comeback season and first the next season.

In his Wizards debut — more than three years after his final game for the Bulls — Jordan scored 19 points on seven-of-21 shooting in New York. He also had six assists, five rebounds and four steals. Yet to Chicagoans who had watched him lead the Bulls to six NBA titles, he looked odd in that Washington uniform and somehow reduced.

As the season went along, he improved. He was extraordinarily smart as a player, a side of him that had always gotten lost in his absurd talent and relentless competitiveness. He adapted his game to compensate for the athleticism that age had stolen. Instead of the powerful first step that had reduced opponents to nervous tics and spasms, he developed a step-back jump shot that was as merciless as a contract killer.

Until he tore cartilage in his right knee in February 2002, the Wizards were thinking about making the playoffs. But the possibility of a physical breakdown was always implicit in the deal: You'd get glimpses of the old Michael, the superstar, but you'd also get an old Michael, an injury risk.

He was able to come back later in the season, but the Wizards were out of the playoff hunt and finished 37-45, as they would the next season. He led the team in scoring at 22.9 points a game. The next season, he averaged 20 points and was the only Wizard to play in all 82 games.

This was not the Michael Jordan whom America had watched wide-eyed for so many years, but what he was able to accomplish from ages 38-40 was impressive. And the Wizards improved by 18 victories in his first season in uniform.

"It was amazing," said former Bulls coach Doug Collins, whom Jordan hired to coach the Wizards before the comeback. "Obviously, I coached him when he was 25, 26. Michael used to just eat up practice, devour it. At age 40, he couldn't do that. All of a sudden, you have Michael practice for 30, 35 minutes. You say, 'Michael, go put ice

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Michael Jordan battles for a ball against Atlanta Hawk, and former Chicago Bull, Toni Kukoc. REUTERS FILE PHOTO

Nov. 28, 2002: Jordan announces that he will retire for a third time after the 2002-03 season, saying there is "zero" chance of another return.

Jan. 24, 2003: In his final professional game in Chicago, Jordan receives a four-minute standing ovation during player introductions. "I love you all very much," he tells the crowd before scoring 11 points for the Wizards in a 104-97 loss to the Bulls.

Feb. 9, 2003: Jordan scores 20 points in his final All-Star Game, becoming the all-time leading All-Star scorer. He takes Vince Carter's starting spot after Allen Iverson and Tracy McGrady offered theirs.

April 11, 2003: The Miami Heat retire Jordan's No. 23 even though he never played for the team.

April 16, 2003: In the final NBA game of his career, Jordan scores 15 points on 6-of-15 shooting in a 107-87 loss to Philadelphia. He leaves the floor with 1:45 left after a fourth-quarter curtain call. "I'm a guy who loved the game," Jordan says afterward.

Last retirement

May 7, 2003: The Wizards fire Jordan as president of basketball operations.

June 15, 2006: Jordan becomes part-owner of Charlotte Bobcats and becomes, according to the team, "Managing Member of Basketball Operations."

Dec. 29, 2006: Jordan and wife, Juanita, divorce after 17 years of marriage. Juanita reportedly receives a \$168 million settlement.

May 2, 2007: In a pro-am round at the Wachovia Championship in Charlotte, Jordan plays with Tiger Woods. "This is great, no one knows I'm here," Woods says on the 10th tee.

January 2008: Nike rolls out the 23rd edition of the Air Jordan basketball shoe.

April 6, 2009: Jordan is elected to the Basketball Hall of Fame class of 2009.

April 28, 2008: Jordan hires Larry Brown to coach the Bobcats.

Friday: Michael Jordan will be officially inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame.

SOURCES: Chicago Tribune files, Associated Press, NBA.com, University of North Carolina athletics web site archives

Washington, D.C.

“With young guys sometimes, you get them coming in loafing in practice and they don’t understand the true value of hard work. Michael was 39 and he was still trying to get better.”



Jordan leaves the MCI Center in Washington on May 7, 2003, after he was fired by Wizards owner Abe Pollin. AP FILE PHOTO

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on your knee.’ Then you have the rest of your team practice a little longer.

“Sometimes the younger players took exception to that, like it was punishment. I said, ‘This guy doesn’t have that many miles left in those legs, and we’ve got to preserve that.’

“That didn’t sit well.”

As time went on, the relationships between Jordan and some of the younger players got ugly, especially his dealings with Kwame Brown, whom Jordan had taken with the first overall pick in the 2001 draft.

Brown is to Jordan’s résumé what “Gigli” is to Ben Affleck’s.

“Unfortunately, a lot of the good stuff Michael did get glossed over,” Collins said. “I think people look at it and say, ‘They drafted Kwame Brown and traded Rip Hamilton.’ But I was there when the draft was going on that year, and Kwame Brown was the consensus No. 1 pick by so many of the teams. I can tell you our phones were ringing off the hook, people trying to trade to get to that No. 1 pick.

“The fact that Kwame didn’t play well then came onto Michael, who took a lot of heat. But I know the Chicago Bulls wanted to move up to get him. We were going to make the deal and get Elton Brand. They eventually ended up making a deal with the Clippers and took Tyson Chandler.”

There was no doubt Jordan saw Brown as lacking toughness, and there also was no doubt he saw it as his duty to point out that deficiency. According to a 2002 Washington Post story, Jordan used an anti-gay epithet to describe Brown after he complained about a no-call. At a later practice, Brown would break down and cry.

“No matter whether he could play or not, no 19-year-old right out of high school deserved to be treated like that,” Leahy said. “He was getting it not only from Michael but also from Collins. But Kwame aside, for a while, Michael was quite good with the others, people like Hamilton, Courtney Alexander.”

Brown, now with the Pistons, did not respond to several interview requests. Jones, who is retired and works in player development for the Mavericks, said playing with Jordan meant responding with maximum effort.

“With young guys sometimes, you get them coming in loafing in practice and they don’t understand the true value of hard work,” he said. “Michael was 39 when I played with him, and he was still trying to get better.”

Collins agreed about the younger players. “Michael is a very dominant personality,” he said. “The guy is the greatest competitor of all time. If you’re going to play with him, you better be able to step up to the plate and meet that kind of challenge. A lot of the younger players were overwhelmed by that.

“The one thing you had to prove to Michael was that under pressure, he could trust you — and as a coach as well.”

During a December game in Jordan’s first season, the Wizards were getting crushed by the Pacers. Collins’ decision to take him out of the blowout ended Jordan’s streak double-figure scoring at an NBA record 866 games. Collins didn’t know about the streak until afterward, and Jordan said publicly it wasn’t a big deal that he finished the game with six points.

But when he walked onto the team bus, he sat down next to Collins.

“He looked at me and asked me a question that I’ll never forget,” Collins said. “He said,

‘Do you think I can still play?’ I said, ‘Yeah, Michael, I still think you can play. That’s why I’m here with you — to try to help you out to get this franchise right.’

“And he said, ‘Well, if you’re going to be my coach, you have to believe in me.’ I said, ‘I believe in you.’ He said, ‘You did the right thing tonight, but I just wanted you to know that I can still play.’ ”

Two nights later, he scored 51 points against Charlotte. He followed up with 45, including 22 straight points for the Wizards, against New Jersey. And not long after, he scored his 30,000 career point, against the Bulls.

“I think in his heart of hearts, he wanted to know the guy that he was locked arm in arm with believed in him,” Collins said.

By the second season, some of Jordan’s teammates were not in lockstep with him. They were stung by his public criticism of them, especially when he questioned their hearts. At least one newspaper story said Jordan turned on players when they didn’t pass the ball to him. There are those in the Jordan camp who point out that the roster wasn’t exactly filled with scorers. Jordan’s detractors respond that as the team’s de facto general manager, he was in charge of that roster.

Whatever the case, there’s no denying that what had started off so joyfully had turned messy. And Pollin’s people were tiring of what they saw as Jordan’s lack of gratitude for being given a percentage of the team for free.

Jordan’s image was dented off the court as well. In October 2002, he sued his former lover, Karla Knafel, alleging that she tried to extort \$5 million from him. In a countersuit, Knafel charged that Jordan owed her the money for remaining silent and agreeing not to file a paternity suit after she became pregnant.

DNA tests later determined that Jordan wasn’t the father. Her suit died in the courts.

If there were a statue of Jordan in front of the Wizards’ arena, what would it depict? Michael handing out money to wing-tipped businessmen? Or maybe something more post-modern? Jordan as an ATM — Automated Teller Michael?

The area around what was then called the MCI Center (now the Verizon Center) already was going through a renaissance, but the addition of Jordan supercharged it. The Penn Quarter neighborhood sizzled on game nights. The same phenomena had happened on the West Side in Jordan’s Chicago years, in the area surrounding the United Center.

He established a restaurant, Jordans, in the Ronald Reagan Building on Pennsylvania Avenue, and it was an immediate hit.

“Anytime there was a rumor he was coming to dinner, we’d get 150, 200 reservations that night,” said Daniel Mahdavian, who was the restaurant’s general manager. “It was remarkable. I had to schedule extra staff when I knew he was coming. He usually gave us a heads-up. I knew we were going to have a huge number of reservations and a huge number of people coming to see him.”

Mahdavian said Jordan would come to the restaurant two or three times a week when the Wizards were in town. He would visit diners at their tables. Now it can be told: His favorite item on the menu was sweet-potato fries.

“I used to pick the music — it was a voodoo-bar kind of music,” Mahdavian said. “One day he said to me, ‘I need to teach you about our music.’ He sent his assistant

Wizards			PER GAME AVERAGES		
SEASONS	GAMES	FG%	POINTS	REBS.	ASTS.
2001-02	60	41.6	22.9	5.7	5.2
2002-03	82	44.5	20.0	6.1	3.8
Wizards	142	43.1	21.2	5.9	4.4
Career	1,072	49.7	30.1	6.2	5.3

to buy me 150 R&B CDs. He was very generous and giving.”

Whether Jordan’s presence had a lasting effect on the neighborhood around the Verizon Center is open to debate. It already was growing before he arrived. Businesses were setting up shop. Restaurants were thriving.

But when Jordan was playing, the Wizards were getting 5,000 more people a game than they were when he was an executive. The area felt it.

“I will say this — I ain’t seen any of them businesses close up,” said Walker, the pastor. “They got established, and they’re still here. In that sense, I guess you’ve got to say his footprint is on the city. He gave it a fresh life. I think we’re better off that he was here for that short stint than if he hadn’t been.”

Whether the same can be said about the Wizards is also up for debate. Some argue that Jordan weakened the franchise by selling out the future for a chance to win while he was playing. A conflict between Richard Hamilton and Jordan reportedly led to Hamilton’s trade to Detroit and the arrival of Jerry Stackhouse.

Collins sees it differently.

“He left them in a situation cap-wise where they had enough money to go out and sign Gilbert Arenas,” he said. “The talent level was appreciably better when Michael left than when he started. I think a lot of that gets lost.

“And then you talk about the games he played. The games were all sold out. Washington was buzzing about basketball again. Again, a lot of that gets lost.”

When Jordan’s relationship with the Wizards ended, his restaurant closed soon after.

“He was the main reason that restaurant was going to be successful,” Mahdavian



Jordan confers with Wizards coach Doug Collins during an exhibition game in 2002. AP FILE PHOTO

said. “After he was gone, the management tried to keep the place alive by making it more of a bar scene. That was the end of that. A lot of people in the city felt like he was used [by the Wizards].”

On May 7, 2003, Pollin let Jordan go during an 18-minute meeting. Just like that. Jordan believed he had a verbal understanding that allowed him to resume his duties. He felt a keen lack of appreciation for helping the franchise make a huge profit with him in a Wizards jersey.

In turn, Pollin and team president Susan O’Malley were taken aback by Jordan’s arrogance and what they perceived as his presumption that he would one day take control of the team, according to Leahy.

There were irreconcilable differences, though only one side, Pollin’s, saw it that way. Right until the end, Jordan thought he was going to win. He always thinks he’s going to win.

The night before the meeting, Jordan had dinner with Ted Leonsis, the Washington Capitals owner who owns 44 percent of the Wizards. Jordan being Jordan, he thought he could persuade Pollin to give him back his title and share of the team. A week before, Jordan had implied he was a front-office free agent, ready to take his pick of several jobs around the NBA. He was criticized heavily for the comment and later tried to get the car back on the road by saying he was fully committed to the Wizards.

It was too late. The organization already questioned his work ethic as an executive. His perceived lack of loyalty was the final straw.

“For the first time in his life, he was playing defense,” Leahy said. “Nobody ever taught him how to play defense. He never said the words that might have been able to save him, something along the lines of: ‘I might have chosen my words poorly. I really do want to be a part of this organization. I’m grateful for the chance I was given to come in here to be president, though I had had no executive experience before, and to have a free slice of ownership, for which I didn’t put up a dime.’ ”

Jordan might have seen that sort of statement as capitulation or failure. Or perhaps, as Leahy said, he just didn’t know how to do it. And for all the people Jordan employed to give him advice, he apparently didn’t have anyone pointing him in the right direction.

Other than releasing a statement congratulating Jordan on his upcoming Hall of Fame induction, Pollin declined comment, as did Leonsis, who was considered a confidant of Jordan’s while MJ played in Washington.

Five months after cutting ties with Jordan, Pollin did talk about his decision.

“It was an atmosphere on edge,” he told the Associated Press. “It was not a healthy atmosphere to produce a happy organization or a winning team.”

Collins, who found himself in the middle between Jordan and Pollin, said Jordan felt betrayed.

“I think he felt like that if he played those two years that he was going to be able to go back up into the front office and go back to building the team,” Collins said. “He felt like he had lived up to his end. I think that was tough.”

The story was not supposed to end with a seething, reeling icon driving away in a luxury vehicle.

But it did.

The trophy case



SOURCE: NBA

PHIL GEIB AND DAVID INGOLD / TRIBUNE

Charlotte



Bobcats executive Michael Jordan with new head coach Larry Brown in April.

AP PHOTO

Uncertainty looming at helm of Bobcats

Michael Jordan's basketball wizardry has yet to translate to the front office in his second tour as an NBA executive.

Following the unsatisfying end to his tenure as player/president of the Washington Wizards, Jordan bought into the Charlotte Bobcats in June 2006 and was assigned the role of managing partner.

He began surrounding himself with familiar faces. Former Bulls teammate and close friend Rod Higgins is the team's general manager. Larry Brown, with whom Jordan shares a North Carolina pedigree, is the Bobcats' coach. Assistants Phil Ford and Dave Hanners are also former Tar Heels, as is point guard Raymond Felton, a restricted free agent.

But Carolina loyalty hasn't colored all of Jordan's basketball decisions. Shooting guard Gerald Henderson, from archrival Duke, was the Bobcats' first-round pick in the June NBA draft.

Launched as an expansion team in 2004-05, the Bobcats have yet to make the playoffs and have battled the state's well-established college programs for fan support. Last season's 35-47 record was the best in the five-year history of the franchise.

But Jordan, Higgins and Brown continue to tinker with the roster. In July they dealt center Emeka Okafor, No. 2 pick in the 2004 draft, to the New Orleans Hornets for former Bull Tyson Chandler. In March they traded Adam Morrison, Jordan's first draft pick and the No. 3 overall pick in 2006, to the Lakers for Vladimir Radmanovic. And before last season they sent leading scorer Jason Richardson to Phoenix for Boris Diaw and Raja Bell.

Jordan might not be with the Bobcats for the long term.

Majority owner Robert Johnson paid \$300 million for the expansion franchise in 2004. Forbes magazine valued it at \$274 million last year, and Johnson has expressed a desire to sell.

A group Jordan heads evidently failed to meet Johnson's asking price over the summer, and at least one other potential buyer has entered the bidding. Whether new ownership would retain Jordan in a management role is unknown.

The money

Michael Jordan is one of the world's foremost pitchmen, a powerful brand that has sold everything from food to clothing to cologne. In 1990, Forbes began tracking his earnings. In 1998, Fortune magazine appraised the overall Jordan Economic Effect at \$10 billion.

Scale in millions

